“We, the Fans”:
Power in the Democratic Archive of Fanfiction

Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde
der Fakultät für Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften der Universität Regensburg

vorgelegt von

Alexandra Herzog
aus Oberviechtach/Regensburg
2014

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Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Udo J. Hebel

Gutachterin: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Nassim W. Balestrini, M.A.

“What makes a story work? Is it the plot, the characters, the text? The subtext?
And who gives a story meaning? Is it the writer? Or you?
Tonight, I thought I would tell you a little story and let you decide.”

Metatron, the Scribe of God
Supernatural, 9x18 “Meta Fiction”

For my family

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"For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me.
Here at the end of all things, Sam."

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*.

1. "We, the Fans": The Democratic Potential of Fanfiction

> "What I love about fandom is the freedom we have allowed ourselves to create and recreate our characters over and over again. Fanfic rarely sits still. It's like a living, evolving thing, taking on its own life, one story building on another, each writer's reality bouncing off another's and maybe even melding together to form a whole new creation. [...] I find that fandom can be extremely creative because we have the ability to keep changing our characters and giving them new life over and over. We can kill and resurrect them as often as we like. We can change their personalities and how they react to situations. We can take a character and make him charming and sweet or coldblooded and cruel. We can give them an infinite, always-changing life rather than the single life of their original creation. We have given ourselves license to do whatever we want and it's very liberating. […] If a story moves or amuses us, we share it; if it bothers us, we write a sequel; if it disturbs us, we may even re-write it! We also continually recreate the characters to fit our images of them or to explore a new idea. We have the power and that's a very strong siren. If we want to explore an issue or see a particular scenario, all we have to do is sit down and write it."
>
> Kim Bannister qtd. in Jenkins, "Reading" 140; also cf. Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 86

In a few words, Kim Bannister[1] encapsulates the upheavals fanfiction writing has brought to traditional concepts of authorship, text, and the relation between writers and their readers—or, phrased differently, the revolution fanfiction writing initiated in a media landscape that used to rely on its productions functioning as a "narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 5). "We have the power," says Kim Bannister, a fanfiction writer herself, and emphasizes that it has been fans like her who have brought about the "liberating" change: "*We* have given *ourselves* license to do whatever *we* want" (my emphasis). Independent from forces outside of fandom and disrupting conventional notions of fans that would position them as passive devotees (cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 9-15), fannish writers use their own agency—the "freedom we have allowed ourselves"—to release stories and characters from what they style to be the "single life of their original creation" and to "give them an infinite, ever-changing life." In short, as this dissertation shows, they transform the one-dimensional and uniform published text attributed to a single authorial entity into a multi-dimensional and multi-voiced textual archive, whose virtually infinite

[1] Throughout this dissertation, (screen) names of fans are cited as given by them, regardless of whether they seem to resemble an English-language first and last name or if they are creative amalgamations of words, letters, and/or numbers such as, for example, Phee-Nyx-1244.

expansion rests on the participation of manifold fannish authors: Eliminating the idea of the fan as a mere consumer, they here redefine themselves as active producers—as *fanauthors*[2] in the archive, they redefine conventional conceptions of authorship and text and dissolve the binary that traditionally separates writers and readers. Power and agency, as Kim Bannister insists, thus reside with the creators of fanfiction instead of their traditional keepers, i.e. the creators of 'original' texts, of 'professional' writing, of cultural artifacts 'worthy' enough of being published.[3]

In a nutshell, Kim Bannister's final dictum of "All we have to do is sit down and write it" expresses the mindset of the fanwriters and provides a marked contrast to traditional ideas of the fan or the reader in general. Far from their conventional characterization as "passive" (van Zoonen 61; also cf. Abercrombie and Longhurst 15-19; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 9-49; Jenkins, "Afterword" 358; Costello and Moore 124-25; Brough and Shresthova), fans do not at all languish in an alleged "inertia of consumption" (de Certeau 167) but instead take action. Writing fanfiction stories, they become active participants in the creation and transformation of media products and cultural artifacts, which, in the end, fundamentally questions deeply ingrained assumptions about the roles of fans and producers in today's media industry. Inherently, the genre of fanfiction opposes prominent ideas of a powerless audience as put forward, for example, by Stephen

[2] In contrast to the established forms *fan author*(*s*) and *fan writer*(*s*), this thesis introduces the terms *fanauthor*(*s*) and *fanwriter*(*s*) to fan studies: The compound spelling is meant to emphasize the hybrid identity of the fanauthor, who bridges the gap between reading and writing by being a fan ('reader') and an author. For an in-depth discussion of the role of the fanauthor, cf. chapter 3.2 of this dissertation.

As this dissertation is concerned with fanfiction, I refrain here from using the media studies coinages *prosumer* or *produser* (cf., for example, Booth 22; Müller and Schreiber 186-87), which tend to refer to non-fanfiction Web 2.0 spaces such as Wikipedia or YouTube, even though Axel Bruns' 2008 monograph *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* dedicates an albeit very brief subchapter to fanfiction (232-33). In its emphasis on the production of written text, the term *fanauthor*/*fanwriter* is also markedly different from *interactant*, which Siobhan O'Flynn proposes to denote "participatory engagement" within games. In her studies of interactive adaptations such as games designed within the *Harry Potter* universe, she defines an interactant as an "active user who is often positioned as a character within the narrative" (88) and can thus exert influence on the course of the game.

[3] In my dissertation, I use the terms *author*(*s*) and *producer*(*s*) as largely interchangeable when referring to creators of texts (cf., for example, Johnson and Gray 1-6; Müller and Schreiber 186-87; Wright 176). Although I acknowledge that the label *author* may suggest a single person behind the creative act of writing a text whereas *producer* may rather imply the realm of audiovisual media (which also influences my usage in some subchapters), authorship studies tends to conflate the terms and "looks to multiple sites where authors might be found," i.e. "poets, directors, showrunners, and such" (J. Gray, "When Is" 102).

For a discussion of the highly contested figure of the author/producer and the concept of authorship/authority in media studies, where authorship is above all construed as "a site of multiplicity" and a "site of cultural tension" (Johnson and Gray 10), cf., for example: Hartley 30-37; J. Gray, "When Is" 92-108; or numerous essays in Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson's 2013 *A Companion to Media Authorship*.

King's 1987 novel *Misery* that fictionalizes this prevalent notion in a narrative in which even physical force does not grant real agency to the fan: When famous author Paul Sheldon is kidnapped by his "*number one fan*" (303) Annie, who makes him first dependent upon her for food and water and then violently coerces him to continue her favorite book series as he is the only one able to satisfy her need for more text, it is nevertheless he—the author—who retains a certain "hold over her" (249). The fan remains powerless to influence the story's "creative course," which is completely "outside of her hands" (107) despite eruptions of violence whenever Sheldon writes something that is "not right" (105). The "writer," as Annie says repeatedly in an echo of Roland Barthes, "is God" (35)[4] and, in the universe of the novel, fans cannot aspire to anything beyond waiting to be told "*what happens next*" (242).

Waiting for what happens next, however, has never been a mindset the fanfiction community adheres to; neither do its members believe in the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146) nor do they keep for themselves a "[p]et writer" (King 326) to change what they "always hated" (Jennixst)[5] about the texts they are fans of. Instead of conforming to their traditional conceptualization as an audience devoid of power and influence, fanwriters challenge their alleged status as "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 23) by becoming authors themselves: Their active production of texts makes them claim power and authority, which gives them not only the agency to transform the output of the media industry but eventually to transform the very structures of the media industry by engendering a shift in the distribution and understanding of roles. Unlike Annie, who has to use force to be able to read another novel about her favorite character—and even then does not get the story she wants (King 230-312)—, fanauthors are the ones who have the power to write new stories and come up with new narratives that alter the pre-existing fictional universes of their objects of fandom: They create fanfiction in an overt negation of any notions of a passive consumer audience and ascend to the status of active producers.

[4] In his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," French theorist Roland Barthes encapsulates prevalent ideas of the geniality, originality, and creative energy that are often associated with the figure of the author in the now well-known catchphrase of the "Author-God" (*Image* 146).

[5] Due to the volume of digital texts in my thesis, quotes from web sources without page numbers will not be specifically listed as non-paginated. Fan-texts generally do not feature page numbers; instead, longer stories tend to be split into chapters that can be found under separete URLs.

Activity and agency of 'non-professional' writers—i.e. fans—have thus always been the core characteristics of the genre ever since the first fanfiction stories appeared in the late 1960s in the fandom of the TV show *Star Trek: The Original Series* (USA; 1966-1969).[6] Defined as "any kind of written creativity that is based on an identifiable segment of popular culture, such as a television show, and is not produced as 'professional' writing" (Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 655), fanfiction eliminates traditional ideas of the binary between the figure of an active, i.e. powerful, author or producer and the passive, i.e. powerless, mass audience. Using characters, plots, settings, and other elements of the previously officially published text—i.e. what I call the *meta-text*[7]—, fans create new stories that expand and enrich its fictional universe to transcend the narrow boundaries it confronts them with: Instead of being confined by letters on a page or the minutes aired on TV, fanwriters give their characters a "new life over and over" (Kim Bannister) or write a "completely different version" (R1R1H2) of the plot. Opening up limitless opportunities for textual transformation, they create an infinite, ever expanding archive of text that is made up of multiple voices and storylines (cf. Derecho). No longer is Anakin Skywalker bound to become Darth Vader and no longer are Edward and Bella destined for each

[6] In my thesis, I deliberately use a narrow definition of the term *fanfiction* (*story*) to only include texts that explicitly refer to themselves as fanfiction stories or are "composed by people who self-identify as fans" (Derecho 62). A broader definition might, for example, encompass professionally published non-fannish texts that build on pre-existing narratives (e.g. Alice Randall's 2001 novel *The Wind Done Gone*, which transforms Margaret Mitchell's 1936 *Gone with the Wind* and is now sold as an "Unauthorized Parody" according to the settlement of a lawsuit initiated by the Mitchell estate for infringement of copyright in May 2002; cf. Kirkpatrick) or, in regard to the intertextual potential of fanfiction (cf. chapter 2.2.3), might even cover any kind of writing since "all literature IS one big Intertext where everybody is citing each other" (Oblomskaya qtd. in Derecho 62). For a discussion of the issue what the term *fanfiction* includes, cf., for example: Derecho 61-63; Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 26; Simonova.

[7] Using the term *meta-text* in this dissertation to refer to the text of the originally published object of fandom fans base their fanfiction stories on, I employ the term in deliberate contrast to Henry Jenkins, who brought it into fan studies as the "'ideal' version" of a published text, "against which" single installments such as individual episodes or volumes are "evaluated" and which is "constructed by the fan community through its progressively more detailed analysis" of the published text (*Textual Poachers* 98; also cf. Johnson, "Fan-tagonism" 286). My resignification of *meta-text* avoids the loaded terms *original text* or *source text*, which, although prevalent in fan studies, give the published texts undue significance and thus counteract one of the core characteristics of fanfiction, i.e. its emphasis on fannish participation and the equality of all texts in the archive, be they officially published or fan-produced.

Moreover, fan studies scholars frequently employ the term *canon* to refer to the published text (cf., for example, R. Black, *Adolescents* 20; Kuglin-Altintaş 155); in analogy to most fans, however, I prefer to use *canon* in reference to the 'facts' of the fictional universe as laid out in the meta-text: According to the canon of the TV show *Star Trek: The Original Series*, James T. Kirk is captain of the *Enterprise*, Spock is from the planet Vulcan, etc. These 'facts' would be retained in canoncial fanfiction, whereas non-canonical fanfiction would, for example, make Spock human or have him enter a romantic/sexual relationship with Kirk.

other—in fanfiction, "anything goes" (Parrish, "Back" 180), i.e. no element of the meta-text needs to be retained and rather than being "locked onto one course of direction," fanauthors have the "freedom" (paperbkryter) to explore any kind of gap, possibility, or opening the meta-text provides or suggests. According to *FanFiction.Net*'s call to its writers to "unleash your imagination," the genre is thus characterized by a creative transformation of the meta-text that transcends the confines of a fictional universe previously published and establishes the fanfiction writers as authors in their own right.

In creating their stories, the amateur fanwriters therefore leave their traditional position as recipients of cultural products, take agency, and reconstruct themselves as producers. They do not only deny the meta-text the status of originality and uniqueness it traditionally demands and receives, but also deconstruct established dichotomies that are based on a strict differentiation between author and reader, producer and consumer (cf., for example, de Certeau 172; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 10). In short, fanwriters, as Kim Bannister expresses so well, claim to "have the power" to both appropriate the meta-texts for their own purposes and to transform them in texts of their own—a power they were long denied by the creators of the meta-text: Although practiced in each and every story, fannish participation in the meta-text has long been the subject of fierce conflicts between fans and producers (cf., for example, Ross 218-64; Scott, "Authorized"; Clerc 11-51; Scafidi) and no matter how much the Internet may have broken "down the wall that Hollywood erects," as David Kemper, executive producer of the TV show *Farscape* (USA; 1999-2003), acknowledges (qtd. in Ross 236), the alleged dichotomy between fans and authors—the "wall" between readers and viewers of cultural products and the creators of these items—still constitutes one of the central issues in the genre of fanfiction, with the former trying to dissolve it and the latter in many cases trying to uphold it. The question, therefore, of who possesses power in regard to the meta-texts, of who is in a position of "cultural authority" ("Fans" 119) and also of who owns the meta-texts and their fanfiction archive—i.e. "who owns culture" (Scafidi xii; also cf. Clerc)—is and has always been a determining and decisive factor in the relationship between fans and producers ever since the genre was first established.

Not unique to contemporary culture, this issue of agency and participation already characterized fandom decades ago, and long before today fans "contended with the producers of commercial mass culture or copyright holders over the 'moral ownership' of a particular canon," as Nancy Reagin and Anne Rubenstein assert in their article about the

beginnings and history of fan culture. The practice of fanfiction writing in particular—with its aim to "make a few improvements," or, rather, "big changes" (Goddess of the Multiverses) to the meta-text—reveals a powerful disbelief in the authority of the producers and the inviolability of the published text that stems from the fannish conviction that they not only "own the text" but have the "right of ownership" (Cherry 67-68; also cf. Busse, "Digital" 109-10). Already the very first fanfiction story, which was published in the fanzine *Spockanalia* (*Star Trek: The Original Series*; 5 issues 1967-1970),[8] denied and deconstructed the cultural authority the creators of the meta-text lay claim to by demonstrating the emergence of fanauthors who were no longer content to be relegated to the status of consumers and recipients but demanded to actively participate. They were the first who wanted "more of" and "more from" (Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 19, 26-43; Grandi 26) the meta-text and so challenged the authority of the meta-text and its producers since what they saw on screen or read on paper was no longer enough both in terms of quantity ("more of") and, most importantly, in terms of quality ("more from").

It was particularly the combination of these two notions—of being dissatisfied with the quantitative limitations of the meta-text and its producers' deficient representation of characters, plots, relationships, etc.—that gave rise to the genre of fanfiction writing in the following years and decades: Both in print fanzines and later on the Internet, fanfiction thrived due to its fundamental idea that, to say it in the fans' words, "fandom knows best" (Thelovablewriter), i.e. that fans are at liberty to add to the meta-text what is "missing" (Thanfiction) in terms of both quantity and quality. The stories printed in the fanzines of the late 1960s first gave fanwriters the chance to declare and demonstrate their agency, expressing by the publication of their texts the power they had to change, influence, and transform what was being presented to them and what they were expected to passively consume. In a crucial challenge to the authority of the producers and the meta-text, already

[8] *Fanzine* is a fannish term for a magazine produced by fans for fans; introduced in the 1930s by science fiction fans, fanzines were a popular means of publishing and distributing fanfiction in the media fandoms until the early 1990s and the beginnings of the digital age (cf. "History of Media Fanzines"). From their beginning onwards, fanzines were sold not-for-profit, instituting fanfiction as inherently non-commercial and thus likely to be protected from copyright suits (cf. Fiesler 738).

Most histories of fanfiction such as *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History 1967-1987* by fanfiction writer and fanzine publisher Joan Marie Verba cite *Spockanalia*, edited by Devra Michele Langsam and Sherna Comerford, as the fanzine that contained the first fanfiction story (1; also cf. Brown; Jenkins, "'At other times'" 196). Aware of the fact that fanfiction writing may have been practiced well before without the stories getting published, many accounts, however, claim, tongue-in-cheek, that fanfiction has existed at least since "Circa 220: The Chinese invent paper" (Ecks; Coppa, "Writing Bodies" 226).

these early fannish texts thus show how "[c]onsumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture" (Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Rerun" 60). Continued in fanzines of the 1970s through the early 1990s, the practice of fanfiction writing was "growing exponentially" (Coppa, "History" 46) in these years, with more and more fanauthors questioning the hitherto accepted model of one-sided production and demanding the right to contribute to the fictional archive of the meta-text: Fans, in a term fan studies appropriated from John Berger's 1972 *Ways of Seeing*, a study of European oil paintings, began to develop a "possessive gaze," i.e. they started to "gaze upon the world [...] *as if* it were owned or could be potentially owned" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 83).

This emerging belief in the fannish ownership of texts entailed the expansion of fanfiction writing to a variety of meta-texts, which became increasingly diverse in terms of their genres, plots, or character constellations.[9] Not until the late 1990s, however, did fanfiction become the "gigantic international phenomenon" (Coppa, "History" 44) it is nowadays: As with so many other areas of contemporary life, the invention and popularization of the Internet and the subsequent move of fans to the digital space have brought tremendous changes to the genre, which is today "bigger, louder, less defined, and more exciting than it's ever been" (Coppa, "History" 57). From the near ubiquity of stories and writers[10] to the all-powerful belief that "texts reside in the hands of the fans" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 8)—as of the 2010s, fanfiction has become a cultural movement indicative of larger upheavals the media landscape is experiencing at the moment. The idea of an active and influential audience participating in the production of cultural objects is evidently no longer confined to the genre of fanfiction only but slowly shows to be beginning to take root in the creation of books, movies, or TV shows (cf., for example, Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*; Ross; Sun Jung); an idea that originated with the first fanfiction, i.e. when the first fans were dissatisfied with the meta-texts' "loose ends, unanswered questions, and unhappy endings," took up their pencils, and sat down to write and publish their "attempt[s] at

[9] For a history of fanfiction that focuses on the increasing diversification of meta-texts within the period between the late 1960s and the early 2000s, cf. Coppa, "History" 43-58; also cf. Ecks; Morrison; "History of Media Fanzines."

[10] Googling the term *fanfiction*/*fan fiction*, for example, results in more than 69 million hits; the terms *fanfiction*/*fan fiction story* in more than 57 million results (September 2015). According to Alexa, a web information company which monitors Internet traffic, *FanFiction.Net* consistently ranks among the top 500 most visited websites in the United States and among the top 1,500 globally (September 2015).

fixing all that" (ShadowPast620) has led to participatory TV shows such as *Supernatural* (USA; 2005-; cf. chapter 4) whose fans contribute to its production process: Today, as this thesis shows, fannish practices of participation, the dissolution of the binary between producers and consumers, and a dehierarchization of texts are thus impacting the entertainment industry, reforming it according to the fans' ideals of a more democratic media landscape.

Intricately tied to questions of power and influence, this revolution of the media landscape by fans and fanfiction writing has certainly met with opposition—and, as briefly indicated above, sometimes even with fierce resistance—on part of the creators of the meta-texts. The challenge the genre poses to traditional binaries and models of authorship has led to intense conflicts between fans and producers, with both parties debating numerous issues connected to the increasing democratization of production processes and widely different stances towards fannish participation and fanfiction emerging among the latter: Today, TV shows in particular seem to rely gradually more on the presence of a social audience, whose members practice different versions of "tele-participation" on the Internet that creates for viewers "myriad ways in which to experience watching and making TV" (Ross 4) by giving them the chance, for example, to express their opinions in interacting with fellow fans or even to establish contact with the shows' producers. While fans know that these forms of engagement do not necessarily entail that their voices are heard or appreciated—much less listened to (cf. Ross 218-64)—, creators of other meta-texts often do not even display this tacit acceptance of the presence of participating and active fans but vehemently voice their opposition to the mere existence of fanauthors: Apart from Anne Rice, author of the novel series *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003), who has become notorious in fandom for "not allow[ing] fanfiction" as it "upset[s] [her] terribly to even think about fanfiction with [her] characters," there is a number of professional producers who fundamentally dispute the fannish belief in the "shared ownership" (Ross 83) of texts and "request," like novelist Diana Gabaldon, "that [fans] do not write" stories based on their creations.[11]

[11] Lists of authors and producers who either support or oppose fanfiction can easily be found online. Cf., for example, *Fanlore*'s extensive catalog of "Professional Author FanFic Policies" or *FanFiction.Net*'s guidelines that ask fanauthors to respect "the expressed wishes" of a number of writers and declare that the website "will not archive entries based on their work" ("Guidelines"; only accessible to registered members).

Conflicts in fanfiction writing, as can be seen from the various responses to the genre, therefore mainly originate in the very basic question of fannish participation, i.e. whether the producers see fanwriters as 'legitimate' authors whose texts are 'legitimate' contributions to the archive of the meta-text (provided they even see the meta-text as an archive) and whether they accept fans as active participants in the production of cultural material. Challenging the position of the meta-textual creators and of the meta-text itself through its emphasis on the contribution of various voices, fanfiction deconstructs fundamental binaries that the media and entertainment industry has long attempted to uphold in order to introduce a more democratic model of production: It disrupts the previously stable identities of writer/reader, producer/consumer, creator/recipient to engender the figure of the fanauthor who amalgamates both roles to enable the hitherto powerless mass of the audience to engage in active creation. Moreover, the very existence of fan-texts contradicts the "very classic notion of [the meta-text] as something stable and finished, […] crafted by one single, professional individual" (LaChev 85), and thus diametrically opposes traditional assumptions of 'originality' and 'uniqueness' that bar the participation of a multiplicity of voices. In short, fanfiction fundamentally interrogates the sanctioned authority of authors and their meta-texts by initiating and engaging in debates about the entities involved, presenting a counter model to established forms of writing and producing by insisting on the democratic principles of fluidity, multiplicity, and participation—of the equality and the representation of the many.

This democratic potential of fanfiction, i.e. its emphasis on "dethron[ing] the institutionalized authors and owners of texts" (Mullens 7) through the means of a "bottom-up participatory culture" (Sun Jung) is, however, not only inherent in the simple fact of the *presence* of the genre as a literary form and its integration of fanauthors in processes of production (also cf. Pugh, *Democratic Genre*; Coker 81-89). Moreover, as this dissertation is meant to illustrate, this democratic potential is something the fans themselves are aware of and consciously voice in their writing, where it pervades the individual fanfiction stories themselves and the paratexts that accompany them: Fanauthors, I have found in the course of my work on fanfiction, employ distinct textual strategies through which they declare their agency and freely ascertain their liberation from previous hierarchical and quasi-hegemonial constraints of conventional textual production. In addition to previous scholarship that focused on the genre as a whole, my research has thus uncovered how it is with*in* the texts fans produce that they demonstrate and insist on their power and authority,

and so my thesis intends to close a distinct gap in scholarship that has virtually neglected to analyze fannish writing: Their texts, I argue, reveal the genre's democratic potential—reveal the fannish stance to "write about what we want, how we want, when we want because in a way, it's one of our basic rights: freedom of speech" (Chris Robins).

Referring to a fundamental tenet of democratic societies as laid down, for instance, in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States (1791), this fan encapsulates the views of today's fanfiction community and simultaneously hints at the central questions my dissertation is concerned with: For one thing, *how* is it that fans *express* their "basic right" of transforming the meta-text in the text of their fanfiction? And, for another, how does the media industry *respond* to the "freedom of speech" fans are so adamant about exercising?

To find an answer to these fundamental issues of fanfiction writing, this thesis is split into three main parts and thus follows a clear trajectory to establish, illustrate, and evaluate the genre's powerful democratic potential: First, I present a theoretical groundwork of agency and the democratic within fanfiction; secondly, a detailed analysis discusses widespread textual mechanisms of demonstrating power and authority in fannish texts; and thirdly, a case study of the TV show *Supernatural* positions the series as a prime example of fannish participation in the production of a meta-text as a direct consequence of fans' textual activities. Described in more detail, the first part of my dissertation is concerned with two main issues that revolve around the construction of the concept of power and agency within fandom and, in particular, within research on fandom: Looking at how scholars of fanfiction have framed the genre over the years in respect to fannish agency—in particular in light of the differing views about the standing, significance, and hierarchical position of the meta-text within fanfiction and among the fanauthors themselves—, the chapter clarifies how—in terms of theory—fanfiction has developed from a purely "derivative" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 10-19; Pimenova 50-52) to an "archontic" (Derecho; Parrish, "Back" 177-78) genre. After providing a number of perspectives on fannish power and authority to explore scholars' different approaches and to point out their possible shortcomings, I then proceed to reposition fanfiction as a democratic archive that is based on participation, inclusion, equality, and fluidity—in short, on democratic principles.

The second major part of my dissertation investigates the fan-texts, focusing on textual mechanisms fans use to reserve power for themselves. To illustrate in detail fannish strategies of establishing their community as a counterforce to the producers of the meta-text, I draw specific attention to the categories of *Author's Notes* and *fanspeak*, which I subject to close scrutiny in regard to questions of fannish agency: These paratextual comments by the fanfiction writers and the jargon they employ in communicating with each other serve especially well in demonstrating the ways in which fans code their claims to agency in their production of text. Liberating the meta-text from the voice of its creators and establishing their own voices, they institute the figure of the fanauthor and constitute themselves as a powerful community of experts to make both strategies instrumental in supporting their demands to increased participation in the meta-text. Along with an analysis of disclaimers as another example from fannish paratexts and an inquiry into the story genres of Mary Sue and RPF, this part thus comprises a detailed study of strategies of fannish agency, exposing how fans utilize their paratexts and stories to conceptualize themselves as powerful and authoritative participants in a democratic production of texts and, accordingly, how they disrupt long-established binaries within the media and entertainment industries.

Based on this second part that focuses on fannish claims of power and authority as expressed with*in* their texts, the third discloses the efficacy of these claims by illustrating that they have in fact led to major upheavals in the media industry due to its increasing need to accept and work with fannish agency. Studying the TV show *Supernatural* and its representation of fans, fanfiction, and fannish power, I discuss the revolutionary tendencies within the production of meta-texts that originate from fanfiction and the genre's emphasis on a democratic balance of power between fans and producers. Drawing on both the episodes themselves and the dialogue the show's producers and fans engage in, my case study highlights the involvement and inclusion of fannish voices in the creation of the meta-text and positions *Supernatural* as a participatory TV show: Revealing that the program "actually transplant[s] true blue fanfiction to the screen" (Mia Nina) and exposing its production process as more democratic than that of other contemporary TV shows, this chapter therefore illustrates, first, the transfer of the fans' power from their own realm of fanfiction to the domains formerly solely inhabited by the creators of the meta-text and, secondly, provides a glimpse into the possible future of TV

making, which, in the era of Web 2.0, may increasingly have to rely on audience participation and power sharing.

Taken as a whole, my thesis therefore covers fundamental questions of today's media landscape and major cultural developments in US-American and global societies: It discloses fannish strategies of laying claim to participation in the production of textual and cultural artifacts, demonstrating how fans have "given [them]selves license" and "have the power" (Kim Bannister) to dissolve traditional dichotomies of producer and audience by creating a textual archive of infinite dimensions and loose hierarchies. By focusing on the fanauthors' textual mechanisms and the effects they have had in establishing them as an influential party, my thesis provides an assessment of how powerful fanwriters have become through their activities and how the democratic culture of fanfiction communities and their claim to a balance of power has been able to reshape the media landscape. With fanfiction's grassroots model of participation and its democratic potential that hinges on the contribution and involvement of multiple voices, it is no longer the producer of the meta-text who is omniscient and omnipotent in a quasi hegemonic position at the top of a hierarchy of cultural production; instead, the genre's democratic impulse echoes US-American constructions of democracy that gives power to the previously disenfranchised and constitutes the fanwriters as the rule-providing and dominant body in the relationship between audience and producers: "We the fans are in control" (Amy Zukas), "we the fans scare the hell out of writers" (Krista), and "we the fans create to fill all the pot [sic] holes" (SixNewAdventures), because "there's always FanFiction where we the fans make it right" (Hewhoislost).

Transferring the Constitution's republican power of "we, the people" to "we, the fans" has thus been one of the major achievements of the fanfiction writers of the past decades: The Internet has become an effective tool to aid in their effort to create agency for the hitherto passive audience and thus redistribute the power of the privileged few to the masses of fans who actively take part in restructuring the media industry according to democratic principles of visibility, equality, representation, involvement, and participation. Their texts and in particular their strategies of appropriation and empowerment constitute the basis for a far-reaching resignification of fans and their activities that has had profound impact on processes of production and the present-day understandings of authorship, text, and the relation between writers and readers. After all,

it is “[w]e, the fans, [who] make our own version of our favourite characters, and twist and bend them to our will (hazel-3017).”

2. Agency in the Democratic Archive: Theories of Power in Fanfiction

2.1 Approaching the Notion of 'Power' in Fannish Texts

> "So I absolutely loved the idea of Dean having a son, when the CW aired the episode 'The Kids are Alright' in the second season. I'm still not entirely convinced that he's not! Anyways so I took that idea and I expanded it, a lot! Basically Dean and Sam did hunt when they were kids but when they turned 18 they left and no one tried to stop them. I'm not sure if I'm going to include John and Mary in these stories, but I could totally use your guys' advice on that. Oh yeah, Jessica never died because that was just tragic! […] I hope you enjoy. Feedback and reviews are much appreciated!"
>
> browneyedchick, "More than We Could Ever Wish for."

> "Spoilers for JA [*Jedi Apprentice*] books 1,2 and 5,6—barely recognizable as I've completely twisted them to my own liking. Having a general idea of some JA characters would be good, but not necessary. This is an A/U—as in alternate universe, so if you are picky about canon, this is not the place to be. For my purposes, and preference, Qui-Gon's master in this fic will be Master Yoda. […] This one is for you CASCADIA. Thanks so much for all your help and encouragement on this fic and that other monster of mine :) Your advice is always sound and very honest. I've appreciated it more than you know. Thank you. […]
> Xanatos was given no last name in canon. Chiyari was given to him by Susan Anthony and she has given me permission to use it. Thanks Susan!"
>
> Shannz, "Shades of Light."[12]

"Anyways so I took that idea and I expanded it, a lot," writes browneyedchick in her introductory Author's Notes[13] to her *Supernatural* story "More than We Could Ever Wish for," giving voice to the fannish claim of having power over the meta-text by showing her dissatisfaction with its brevity and the fact that it did not follow through with the "idea of Dean having a son." Shannz in turn expresses the fanauthors' fundamental belief in their agency by mentioning that she bases her *Star Wars* story "Shades of Light" on four books of the novel series *Jedi Apprentice* but has "completely twisted them to

[12] Throughout this dissertation, any fannish typographical errors, spelling mistakes, jargon expressions, or other non-standard English words and punctuation remain unaltered from the quoted fan-text to represent fannish writing and its conventions more closely.

[13] *Author's Notes* is a fannish term for fanwriters' comments directed at their readers; these notes tend to precede the story but can also appear at its end (cf., for example, R. Black, *Adolescents* 28, 66-68; R. Black, "Digital Design"; "Author's Note"). For an in-depth discussion of their role and strategic usage in fannish claims to agency, cf. chapter 3.2 of this dissertation and my 2012 article published in the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*.

[her] own liking." In short, it is no longer the meta-texts that serve to satisfy the whole textual needs of their fans but again it is "we, the fans" who demonstrate that they have the agency to reduce the published texts to a mere blueprint for their imagination and writing. The meta-text's fictional universe is "expanded" because fans want "more of" and "twisted" because fans want "more from" it (cf. Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 26-43)—as it is, they resist passive consumption and instead engage in an active transformation of cultural products. Fanfiction thus functions as the visible representation of fannish power and the fanauthors' claim to participation in the creation of a textual archive that does not grant undue importance to the meta-texts and the 'professionals' involved in their production. Instead, fans take over and substitute the 'original' by their stories in an act of democratic intervention.

Fannish agency, as the comments by these fans show, therefore represents the most elemental cornerstone of the genre of fanfiction. An issue heavily debated by fans, producers, jurists, and academics alike, this introductory section of chapter two presents different conceptions of the power of fans, intending to circumscribe the tension-laden field this thesis finds itself in. Despite the stories' indebtedness to the meta-text, which opens up the fictional universe of the fandom, needless to say it is primarily fannish ideas and conceptions that dominate their writing and give life to each and every fanfiction. Demonstrating their power, fanwriters take from the meta-text what they want, omit what they dislike, and transform the fictional universe as presented in the meta-text according to their own "purposes, and preference" (Shannz): Defying the aired episodes of *Supernatural*, browneyedchick, for instance, resurrects the character of Jessica, may choose to ignore the protagonists' parents John and Mary, and fundamentally disrupts the meta-text by having the brothers Dean and Sam give up, as the show's often proclaimed motto has it, their "family business" of "saving people, hunting things" (cf., for example, episode 1x02 "Wendigo"). In a similar fashion, Shannz takes the liberty to present to her readers a different version of the meta-text that does not rely on more than a "general idea of some JA characters." Her words and activities— like any other fanwriter's—display the power that is inherent in the process of "appropriating and transforming the canon into fanon" (M. Gray), i.e. of replacing the static published text by a fan-produced and fully fluid textual archive.

This idea of the fan as someone who creates "infinite, always-changing life" (Kim Bannister qtd. in Jenkins, "Reading" 140) and does with the meta-text "whatever [they]

wish" (Cris) permeates millions of stories, countless Author's Notes, and quasi-infinite discussions on the Internet. Both fanfiction and fannish statements accordingly provide a thorough idea of the fans' point of view in terms of what their agency and power encompasses, highlighting the democratic nature of their endeavors: "It's fanfiction. It's free," writes, for instance, BookishQua, expressing the fans' belief in their unrestricted right to participate and their unconstrained liberty to create new texts. Fanauthors like her emphasize that textual worlds have become fluid through fannish activities, which prove instrumental in dissolving conventional binaries of producer and audience and establishing a new understanding of these entities. In the words of Henry Jenkins,

> [f]ans reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths. [...] [T]he right to participate in the culture is assumed to be "the freedom we have allowed ourselves," not a privilege granted by a benevolent company […]. Fans also reject the […] assumption that intellectual property is a "limited good," to be tightly controlled lest it dilute its value. Instead, they embrace an understanding of intellectual property as "shareware," something that accrues value as it moves across different contexts, gets retold in various ways, attracts multiple audiences, and opens itself up to a proliferation of alternative meanings. (*Convergence Culture* 256)

In fannish judgment, therefore, their agency is virtually unlimited and all-encompassing: Adhering to the thinking that texts are "shareware," they do not heed instances that might insist on possible copyright restrictions or invoke the notion of a moral ownership[14] of texts and their elements; instead they actively "renounce such authority and take control in their own transformative hands" (Mittell). Inherently, they believe that, "once a media text is released to the public, it belongs to them" (Scott, "Fan Vid"). Fandom, in the fans' definition, is thus a space of unique and special liberty, where they have unrestricted agency according to their vision of a democratic media landscape that rests on the equality and representation of multiple voices. Fanfiction in particular has

[14] The moral rights an author may claim in respect to his/her copyrighted work are based on the assumption that there exists a "deep and unique connection between author and text such that an insult to the text is an assault on the author" (Tushnet, "Copyright" 61). Producers often invoke this "connection between author and text" when they seek to restrict fannish productivity; so says George R.R. Martin, author of the novel series *A Song of Fire and Ice* (1996-), for instance: "My characters are my children [and] I don't want people making off with them, thank you."

On an author's moral rights in general, cf. Article 6bis of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (first ratified in 1886; 165 countries as parties as of March 2012); also cf. an article on the authorship of serial narratives by Ian Gordon, where he asserts that as a tendency "moral rights of authors do not get much play in America" (223).

acquired an almost mythical status that promises the fulfillment of an archetypal dream of the power and participation of the individual in the creation and shaping of culture: Frequently portrayed as a "magical place" that allows everyone "the freedom to write what you want and what should have happened in your perspective, and discuss it with people who feel the same way" (Mrs. Jessica Grayson), the genre is revered as a gateway to a time without copyrighted works—either in the future of Web 2.0's "free flow of data" (Zimmer) or in the past as, for example, before the British 1710 Statute of Anne, which was the first provision in the Western world for legal protection of fictional works. "Envision[ing] a world where all of us can participate" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 256), fans accordingly see fanfiction as a chance to (re)connect with or establish societal forms that function without a professionalized publishing industry and put a maximum of agency into the hands of its storytellers.

In addition to evoking a possible future in which "our modern fiction of the author as the sole creator of unique, original works" (Woodmansee 25; also cf. Jaszi) has been completely dissolved by the ongoing digitization, the rising participation of Web 2.0 structures, and the increasing loss of static Internet spaces (cf., for example, Booth 86; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 4-44), fans like Mrs. Jessica Grayson remind their readers of fanfiction's indebtedness to the age-old idea of "communal stories" that heavily rely on a "pre-existing fictional universe" (Pearson 12). Prevalent in both oral communities and literate cultures, this type of storytelling has dominated humankind's relation to its texts for millennia and is characterized by the storyteller's ability to use, recount, and thereby transform central myths and legends. Without employing the ahistorical notion of a democratic form of writing, some scholars such as Lucy Pearson, Sheenagh Pugh (*Democratic Genre* 9-16) and Rebecca W. Black (*Adolescents* 10-11) nevertheless highlight the way in which fanfiction's stories employ the meta-text corresponds to these features and thus trace the roots of fanfiction to the practices of the European Middle Ages and its literary culture of transformation.[15]

[15] According to Lucy Pearson, it is particularly the literatures of the European Middle Ages that function as a forerunner to fanfiction: Not only does she stress the importance of written and preserved texts, which—in contrast to pure oral cultures—provide a certain fixed version to be altered in later renditions (cf., for example, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, a German adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes' French *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, whose plot and protagonists in turn are taken from the British Arthurian legend); moreover, the "Middle Ages prized authority above originality, and medieval authors conventionally claimed an external author for their writing […] This convention is mirrored in the copyright disclaimer featured at the heading of every fanfic" (12).

In the context of this dissertation, however, it needs to be pointed out that the significance of the fact that fannish productivity evokes the idea of "communal stories" far exceeds theories about the origins of fanfiction: Instead, the notion of "communal stories" can foremost inform readings of the genre because it focuses all agency in the audience of the re-told and re-shaped myths and legends, which accordingly furnishes its own storytellers and is inherently independent from a creator persona. Without copyright restraints—without even the existence of an author to claim rights of creation or origin—, it is the community itself who owns these texts, and any member is free to re-tell them, to transform and adapt them to their own needs and purposes. In calling fanfiction a "magical place" like Mrs. Jessica Grayson, fans therefore constitute themselves in the role of ancient/medieval or even mythical storytellers, assuming this figure's inherent power since, as fanauthors, they are the ones who are at liberty to both make use of the community's stories and to present them in new forms. In accordance with this reading, the fannish belief in their own power over the meta-texts has its origin in a long tradition of human storytelling, in which the audience is the central agent who owns their "communal stories" and regards the "exclusivity of ownership engendered by copyright [as] no more than a blip in the historical norm" (Pearson 12).

Contrary, however, to fans' confidently voiced statements of ownership of the meta-texts, which they use "however [they] wish" (kurosaki9), their freedom of appropriation and transformation is frequently and harshly contested by the original producers. Author George R.R. Martin, for instance, according to whom there "are a lot of us who oppose fan fiction," characterizes himself and others he speaks for as inherently protective of their creations and even hateful towards those who supposedly violate their fictional universes. Everything in the world of his novels, Martin claims, is "controlled by me. I decide who gets to borrow my creations, and I review their stories, and approve or disapproval [sic] what is done with them." Negating the fannish "understanding of intellectual property as 'shareware'" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 256), these writers insist on the exclusive ownership of their works and see themselves—in the words of science fiction author Charlie Stross—in the role of a "glittery and avaricious dragon who is jealous of his steaming pile of gold" and who warns fanwriters to "not steal the dragon's gold." Opposing fannish productivity and their principle of the "shared ownership" (Ross 83) of texts, they seek to repress fanauthors, returning them to a status of passivity long prevalent in conceptions of fandom and audiences: Fans are construed to be "prisoner[s]

of the text" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 18), consumers who may be fascinated by the meta-text but preferably remain inactive—"passive masses to be fed and controlled by producers/authors" (Wright 176). Arguing in this fashion, authors like Martin or Stross—or Terry Goodkind, Diana Gabaldon, Lee Goldberg, and Anne Rice, to just name a few—are indicative of a still prevalent mindset among producers who seek to retain a one-dimensional and one-way flow of information akin to Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's description of the "media as a narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe" (5).

Adamant about their own ownership and power, these authors therefore deny fans any agency to "play with the characters" (love.lifemusic) and create a "New World" (amazinginvisiblegirl) within the fictional universes the meta-text sketches in broad strokes. In a similar fashion, producers of TV shows insist that fans refrain from interfering with the aired material, reserving the power of writing for themselves: "*We*," persists *Farscape* producer David Kemper in a curious twist of the aforementioned, "are the storytellers" (qtd. in Ross 248); fans, in the opinion of David Eick, executive producer of the reimagined version of *Battlestar Galactica* (USA; 2004-2009), "really want *you* to tell *them* a story" (qtd. in Ross 249; my emphasis). Intent on relegating fans to the passive position of an audience that merely listens, watches, and consumes, these producers echo the description *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry offered of TV viewers, who "sit out there as ever, with a hand poised over the control knob, beer, potato chips and a dozen other distractions around them" (qtd. in Jenkins and Tulloch 7) but whose interaction with the text is largely limited to expressing their likes and dislikes. "[A]s a [professional] writer," asserts Julie Martin, producer of TV shows such as *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* or *Homicide: Life on the Street*, in regard to their superiority in comparison to amateur fanauthors, "it has to be the story that *you* want to tell, that is *your* vision" (qtd. in Ross 248).

Although it needs to be acknowledged that some "sectors of the television industry do, in fact, want to listen […] in the hopes of translating fans' circulation of cultural capital into economic capital" (Ross 75) and the well-known producer, screenwriter, and director J.J. Abrams even claims that "you'd be moronic not to listen to the fans" (qtd. in Veitch), the notion of fannish power and authority is not yet widespread among the producers of the meta-texts. With the exception of a very limited number of texts—among them *Supernatural*, as I discuss in chapter four of this thesis—, authors often prefer to

uphold and intensify the supposed binary between themselves, the active creators, and the fans, the passive recipients, confirming the sentiment of the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146; also cf., for example, Mittell; Scott, "Authorized" 218): In the eyes of most producers, fannish agency is at best tolerated and used as a source for information[16]; at worst, it is considered "rude," "immoral," and "illegal" ("Professional Author Fic Policies").

This dichotomy between fans' conviction of their power and agency and the diametrically opposed point of view of the producers is, however, not necessarily mirrored in other fields concerned with fans' activities. Both law and academia, for example, offer different perspectives that may present fruitful alternatives to the author-audience binary in talking about and theorizing fandom. Whereas fan studies, as I show in the following, has developed tremendously divergent approaches over the roughly three decades of its existence that range from labeling fanfiction 'derivative' (cf., for example, R. Black, *Adolescents*; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Pimenova; Coker) to acknowledging fannish (moral) ownership and authority (cf., for example, Ross; Rebaza; van Zoonen; Mullens; Stein and Busse; Hodges and Richmond; B. Thomas, "Gains"), legal scholars have sought to come to terms with the factual reality of the existence of copyright protection of the meta-texts and the simultaneous presence of millions of fanfiction stories and fan-works on- and offline.

In a number of studies, law scholars have explored the legal standing of fanfiction and its authors, investigating how courts might decide in the case of a lawsuit filed by copyright owners against fanwriters. While fanfiction has not yet been called upon to defend itself in an actual court case (Fiesler 739, 746; Tosenberger, "Homosexuality" 203), most analyses follow the argumentation of Rebecca Tushnet, who reasons that the

[16] Some showrunners, for example, admit to reading and participating in online forums in order to gain an idea of 'what works and what not,' to establish a loyal fanbase, and, finally, also to court their consumers. As discussed later, recent years have seen a tremendous increase in the interaction between fans and producers, offering the former a "sense of connectedness" (Ross 251) that does, however, not necessarily translate to a real transfer of power: By portraying themselves as accessible via online chats, personal appearances at conventions, etc., producers ensure that fans are "invested enough in their product to offer their opinions, but this does not mean that they are necessarily going to listen" (Felschow).

On the different positions of TV producers, actors, writers, critics, etc. in terms of their interaction with fans, cf. Ross 218-64; Felschow; Clerc 13-109; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 143-74; Mittell; Schmidt. Sharon Marie Ross in particular elaborates on contemporary developments in what she calls "tele-participation" (4), citing numerous stances from different parties in this ongoing process of "how the Internet has begun to alter people's experiences with television" (3).

genre would fall under Fair Use, i.e. that it would not infringe copyright since it is inherently transformative and non-commercial.[17] By declaring fanfiction writing potentially legal, jurists adjudicate fans agency and authority in disputing the validity of the copyright and intellectual property claims the producers of the meta-text tend to base their arguments of ownership on. In its application of the Fair Use ruling, law may thus have found a possible way of mediating the interests and demands of fans and producers by both confirming the commercial ownership of the latter and the freedom to write of the former despite dissenting voices such as Clay Shirky's, who asserts that, in his opinion,

> [l]awyers would laugh till coffee came out of their noses at the idea that writers can legally borrow other writers' characters, that fan fiction is a special class of creativity, or that writers can own new characters or plots in existing fictional universes without the permission of those who created those universes. (*Cognitive Surplus* 91)

With the idea of Fair Use that seems to bridge the gap between the creators and the fanauthors, legal scholars in the end sanction and validate long-standing fannish sentiments as expressed in the disclaimers that precede most fanfiction stories, acknowledging on the one hand that "[a]ll publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners" (TeamAllTwilight) and, on the other, that they are "free" (BookishQua) to "write [their] own version" (Limited Wisdom) and "play with the world" (Scarlett Astor).

As can be gleaned from this brief analysis of the fans', the producers', and legal scholars' perspectives, the question of fannish agency presents itself as complex and multi-faceted, with every party favoring a widely different approach: The assumption that

[17] Although the application of the Fair Use ruling is said to be "uncertain and unpredictable" (Clerc 160), four factors are usually considered in court according to the US Copyright Act of 1976: "(1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work" (17 U.S.C. §107; also cf. Fiesler 738; Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 661).

In regard to these four factors, scholars argue for the Fair Use nature of fanfiction mainly since (1) it is both non-commercial and transformative, and (4) does not diminish the value of the meta-text but even "enhances the market for official texts and products by generating further interest in them" (Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 669); in the context of the genre, factors (2) and (3) can be considered of less importance. For a detailed application of 17 U.S.C. §107 to fanfiction, cf. in particular Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 661-78; on fanfiction as Fair Use in general, cf., for example: Tushnet, "Copyright"; Tushnet, "Copy"; Tushnet, "Economies"; "Tushnet, "Legal Fictions"; Tushnet, "User-Generated"; Fiesler; Clerc 138-75; Katyal 500-09; Chander and Sunder. In addition to these scholars' opinions, an extensive list of articles in respect to the legal standing of fannish activities can be found on *Fanlore*, which as of late September 2015 contains 79 different entries ("Legal Analysis").

"[w]e the fans are in control" (Amy Zukas), i.e. the fanauthors' belief in their power to "fill in the gaps, continue the story, and have a play with those characters you love […] [in] this huge playground […] with infinite possibilities" (handiangel), clashes heavily with the producers' conviction in their own "right not only to the characters but to how fans interpre[t] the characters" (Clerc 96) and their insistence that "[f]andom," as Lucasfilm's former vice president Jim Ward expresses it, "is about celebrating the story the way it is" (qtd. in Harmon; Murray 11). These binary perceptions of fans' power—or, respectively, their lack thereof—, together with both legal and academic theories, make it necessary for a definition of agency to accommodate a wide range of ideas about the extent/limit of fans' activities and their participation, textual/conceptual authority, and factual/moral ownership of texts.

Before delving into the main part of this chapter to discuss approaches fan studies scholars have brought to fannish agency and to offer a new understanding in its final section, I therefore think it necessary to define this fundamental concept for the purposes of this dissertation: In respect to the productive nature of fanfiction, a broad understanding of the term of *agency* consequently needs to subsume notions of 'being able to do something,' of 'being able to exert power,' of 'being able to change something,' and of 'being able to sustain this change.' Here, I specifically rely on Ross's dual conception of 'power' as briefly introduced in her book *Beyond the Box* of 2008: First, I define agency to encompass the "power *over* some group or entity" (72), i.e. my usage of the term is meant to refer to both fannish appropriation of ownership over the meta-text and fans' ability to influence and alter their relation to the producers of the meta-text; secondly, my conceptualization of agency includes a notion of "power as the opportunity *to do* something in relation to the text" (72), i.e. it is meant to express the fundamental idea behind fanfiction that members of the audience have the "right to participate in the shaping of their content worlds" (Kligler-Vilenchik et al.; cf. Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture'") by writing stories according to their "purposes, and preference" (Shannz).

Based on my definition of agency as including two 'powerful' components, I analyze in the following how scholarship has dealt with this fundamental concept in the roughly three decades of fan studies and how scholars have sought to theorize the significant changes that fanfiction and fannish agency have brought to the binary relation of 'consumers' and 'producers.' Since the late 1980s, scholars have grappled to adequately represent the different aspects of fanfiction writing, expressing an

understanding for the inner mechanics and thought processes alive in the genre and yet remaining firmly situated in the contexts of their respective times in regard to acknowledging the extent of fannish agency. In their theories, researchers such as Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, Abigail Derecho, and others attempt to negotiate between the divergent perspectives fans and producers bring to fanfiction, demonstrating the ensuing tensions between their points of view. As this dissertation discusses the fans' strategies of appropriation and empowerment and the eventual efficacy of their claims, it is thus first necessary to disclose how previous approaches have dealt with exactly the issue of fannish agency before I conclude this chapter by repositioning fanfiction as a democratic archive—a new concept that intends on the one hand to mediate between the widely divergent stances to fannish power and on the other to provide an improved understanding of the practice of fanfiction writing: Inspired by Derecho's reading of the genre as "archontic literature" (61), this approach seeks to adequately account for the contemporary power relations between fans and producers, between fan-text and meta-text, and among fan-texts themselves. Constituting a suitable basis for the subsequent chapter on the actual textual presence of the agency of the fanfiction author in form of their strategies, the democratic archive may therefore prove a useful theory of fanfiction in our increasingly participatory culture and media landscape.

2.2 Deriving the Story Tree by Dialogic Intertextual Poaching: Theories of Fanfiction 1992-2015

The idea of fanfiction as a democratic archive is fundamentally rooted in understanding the different point of views fans, producers, the law, and scholars harbor in regard to *who* is able to claim power and ownership, *who* is an agent, and what is the relation between the participating parties. Since fanfiction first attracted attention from academics in the mid-1980s with Joanna Russ's and Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith's articles on the subgenre of slash,[18] scholars have sought to explore, grasp, and represent this form of literature. Its approach to writing about copyrighted texts and its members' sense of entitlement—of being not only permitted to produce fanfiction but of not needing permission at all—have spawned various theories that find vastly divergent answers to the questions the genre poses in regard to fannish agency. For studying contemporary power relations in fanfiction, it is therefore indispensable to analyze previous scholarly readings, investigating the changes in perspectives that have occurred since, mainly, Henry Jenkins's seminal monograph *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* of 1992, which proposed the first coherent understanding of fanfiction as "poaching," i.e. as an "impertinent raid on the literary preserve" (24) that elevates fanauthors to participants in culture—albeit still rather marginal ones. Highly influential in both its own time and in today's scholarship on fanfiction, the concept has over time been discarded, amended, and re-confirmed (cf., for example, Bury, "Textual Poaching" 36; Hills, "Not Just" 111-14; Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 7; Coker 83-84; Handley 97-99), shaping a large portion of what has been written on the genre by quasi forcing other researchers to position themselves in relation to Jenkins. In doing so, other theories were put forward that seek to explain the shortcomings of his notions and have accordingly gained new perspectives on developments within fanfiction that have arisen mainly in consequence of the increasing digitization of life and culture.

More than two decades have now passed since *Textual Poachers* initially shed light on "fandom's mode of reception, considering issues of textual proximity, rereading,

[18] To define it briefly, the term *slash* denotes a "type of fanwork in which two (or more) characters of the same sex or gender are placed in a sexual or romantic situation with each other" ("Slash"); usually, these characters are male and are not portrayed as homosexual in the meta-text (cf. Celandine Brandybuck; "Slash"). The genre originated with stories about Captain James T. Kirk and the Vulcan Spock from *Star Trek: The Original Series* (cf., for example, Russ; Lamb and Veith; "Slash") and is often considered to be unique to fanfiction due to its intricate portrayal of relationships (cf. Woledge, "Intimatopia" 98; Lamb and Veith 236).

and the translation of program materials into resources" (2). The fact that the book, in Jenkins's own words, is now "old enough to drink and vote" ("*Textual Poachers* Turns Twenty!")[19] has not lessened its impact on fan studies. It was—and still is, according to Kristina Busse and Jonathan Gray—a "discipline defining" book (425), which initiated the fundamental redefinition of what being a fan constitutes that can observed today. It is mainly to Jenkins's credit that fans, fandom, and fanfiction are no longer relegated to the margins of culture and seen in the purely negative light of fanaticism and passivity that *Textual Poachers* was aiming to subvert and deconstruct (9-15). While contemporary research acknowledges fanauthors as active shapers of culture, as powerful participants in processes of production, and as agents able to influence and restructure the media industry, in 1992, the fan

> still constitute[d] a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire. Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remain[ed] a "fanatic" or false worshiper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of "normal" cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality. (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 15)

On comparing this description with portrayals of fans of the 2010s, it becomes evident that scholarship in the wake of Jenkins's "defining" 1992 work has been—at least partly—successful in reconceptualizing fans and audiences. While the image of the 'crazed fangirl' (cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 15; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 59-70, 160-65, 227-29) still persists in segments of mainstream media,[20] today's fanauthors have effectively eliminated the earlier portrayal of fans as "passive couch potatoes, […] mindless dupes, or the vulnerable victims that they [were] often made out to be" (van Zoonen 55). By creating fanfiction and actively producing both stories and discourse about the meta-text, fanwriters have disrupted simplistic dichotomies by reconstituting themselves as a powerful intermediary in "an economic binary between *producer* of media content and *consumer* of media content in a market economy" (Booth 132). Their

[19] The "impact" of *Textual Poachers* is furthermore underlined by the fact that its original publisher Routledge was "willing to reissue it to mark the twentieth anniversary of its publication" (Jenkins, "*Textual Poachers* Turns Twenty!"). The updated edition was published in November 2012 and features an additional introduction.

[20] The redefinition of fan and fannishness within scholarship has not yet completely carried over to mainstream media, which still tends to marginalize fans and often exposes them to ridicule. Aside from reports about young girls engaging in a "*Twilight* frenzy" (Carr) and the franchise's "rabid" (Pinkowitz) fans, fangirls in general tend to be stereotyped as "overweight cat ladies with unhealthy fixations on the male leads of their favorite television shows" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 9).

activities, i.e. their appropriation of the meta-text, their negotiation between meta-text and fan-text, and—most significantly—their generation of new text, evidence the transformation of not only fan culture itself but also of how fandom is perceived and judged.

Contrary to earlier notions about the binary between producers and audience as conceived of by the so-called Frankfurt School and early media studies scholars, it was thus Jenkins's innovative portrayal of fandom as a participatory culture which first offered an "alternative to the concept of the largely passive media consumer" (Jungherr; Jenkins, *Fans* 1);[21] therefore, contemporary transformative fandom has little to do with previous ideas of fans undemandingly accepting what the meta-text presents to them: Not at all limited to the simple possibilities of reading a text in the "dominant," "negotiated," or "oppositional" mode, which cultural theorist Stuart Hall proposed in 1980 as being the only available reactions of an audience to a text (136-38; Costello and Moore 125), fanauthors actively respond to the questions, gaps, and meanings a meta-text offers with their writing. Producing new text, members of a participatory culture have instead made the shift from passive consumers, whose response to a text is of little consequence to anyone but themselves, to active creators and influential framers of media content, who exert power by their fan-works to bring about a democratic restructuring of the media landscape.

With today's conception of fanfiction as participatory and transformative highly indebted to Jenkins's reconstitution of the genre, the remainder of this chapter first delves into his ideas as proposed in *Textual Poachers*, discussing after a brief look at the earliest view of fanfiction as 'derivative' how he considered the question of fannish agency and authority with particular focus on the status of the meta-text and fanfiction as a participatory culture. From there on, I open up a trajectory of theories on fanfiction, introducing Camille Bacon-Smith's metaphor of the story tree as put forward in her

[21] Before Jenkins's seminal work, a highly dominant conception of fans stipulated that it was them in particular who were "expected to be passive and not active or transformative" (Scafidi 128) despite earlier findings in reader-response theory, reception studies, and media studies that attributed to the consumer at least some form of active involvement. This stereotype remained fundamentally untouched by Wolfgang Iser's pioneering work in the late 1960s and the subsequent reinterpretation of reading, listening, and viewing, which initiated a reframing of 'consumption' from a purely passive mode of reception to a process characterized by "communicative activity" (Schweickart 3) through which the instances of author, text, and recipient negotiate meaning.

On reading as an activity directed by text and (a community of) readers, cf., for example: Iser; Fish; de Certeau; on active reading in fandom, cf., for example: Booth 153-77; Roddy; Doctorow.

ethnographic study of the female *Star Trek* fandom in *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, which—picking up the increasing visibility of fans in the media landscape—was also published in 1992. Extending her model from an exploration of the "importance of structure to the aesthetic of fan fiction" within a fairly limited "subdivision of [her] corpus" (63), this dissertation seeks to focus on the theory's function as a precursor to conceptualizing the genre as a democratic archive by employing her assumption that stories within the story tree "do not necessarily fall in a linear sequence" (63) and thus escape the hierarchies at work in other models of fanfiction writing.

In a third step, I discuss the fairly recent application of Mikhail Bakhtin's work on polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogue to fanfiction (cf., for example, Pimenova 53-55; Handley 99-102), which utilizes his ideas of intertextuality and the constant communication between a variety and multiplicity of voices within texts. Basing their model on statements such as his idea that the "speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (*Speech Genres* 93), some theorists of fanfiction see the genre as a prime example of dialogic writing, with each and every story relying on, responding to, and communicating with the meta-text and other fan-texts. While acknowledging the power inherent in dialogue, this part of my thesis is nevertheless also meant to show that even a present-day application of Bakhtin's thinking cannot fully void the temporal distance between his writings and the early 21st century and so cannot sufficiently account for the full realities of fanfiction writing, the conflicted position of the meta-text within the fictional universes constructed by fanauthors, and for the impact of the genre on today's media landscape.

The limits of presenting fanfiction as 'dialogic intertextuality' become immediately obvious in the concluding part of this chapter that serves to reposition and reconstruct the genre as a democratic archive. Working with Derecho's archontic approach as put forward in 2006 (also cf. S. Black), I aim to demonstrate how her ideas constitute a suitable basis for analyzing, portraying, and explaining the relation between the various instances involved in creating fanfiction. Although her model provides only a brief sketch of the genre's archontic nature that suggests the applicability of the notion of the archive to the stories foremost due the "tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess" (64), it nevertheless serves well as a starting point for the goal of constructing a theoretical groundwork for the democratic impulse of fanfiction—i.e. the agency and

power of the fans who oppose producerly hegemony and demand participation: Her ideas inform my reconceptualization of fanfiction as a democratic archive that rests on principles such as the integration and representation of multiple voices and the dehierarchization of texts to establish the equality of fannish and non-fannish writing, which in the end allows me to explore the fanauthors' strategies of claiming and displaying their authority within their texts and to analyze their power in restructuring the media industry in the final case study of *Supernatural*.

2.2.1 "like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write": Fanfiction between the Derivative and the Participatory

"So I absolutely loved the idea of Dean having a son, when the CW aired the episode 'The Kids are Alright' in the second season […]. Anyways so I took that idea and I expanded it," writes browneyedchick in her Author's Notes quoted in full at the beginning of this chapter, explaining the nature of the relationship between her fanfiction "More Than We Could Ever Wish for" and the meta-text of *Supernatural*; similarly, Shannz clarifies that four novels of the *Jedi Apprentice* book series form the basis for her story "Shades of Light," informing her readers that she does not only write within the *Star Wars* fandom in general but narrowing it down to a more specific section of its fictional universe; and, to add one more example of the myriads to be found online, mgowriter summarizes her *Twilight* story "Another Chance" with the words, "A missing scene between Bella and Charlie at the hospital,"[22] spelling out its exact placement as "right after Bella talks to her mom in the hospital, towards the end of the movie" and simultaneously the way it uses the meta-text as an inspiration and starting point.

These three examples of Author's Notes and summaries throw into stark relief what fanfiction can be defined as in its most fundamental sense: "[F]an fiction is derivative work based on copyrighted intellectual property," writes Rebecca W. Black (*Adolescents* 12), pointing out that the genre is substantially dependent on the existence of a meta-text from which it transfers elements to its own stories to use them for its own purposes. With the fact that there exists an interrelation between stories and meta-text

[22] *Missing scene* stories include "scenes which could have happened in [the meta-text] and sometimes must have, but which were not shown" (Pugh, "Democratic"); "invented" by the fanauthors themselves, according to Sheenagh Pugh's article, the subgenre of *missing scenes* is among the most popular types of stories in fanfiction.

obvious in both the definition of fanfiction writing and in each and every story, derivation was one of the earliest and most persistent categories assigned to the genre. Not only did Joanna Russ as the first scholar to publish an article about fanfiction describe the Kirk/Spock slash stories she discusses as "based […] on the TV show" (80); moreover, the concept of derivation is still alive in theorizing fanfiction in the 2000s despite the development of other models in the meantime and the "possible pejorative connotations" (Pimenova 51) the term may evoke. While acknowledging that the idea of derivation has long been associated with the derived work being unoriginal, secondary, and "consequently of little value" (Balestrini, "Adaptation Studies" 7),[23] some of today's fanfiction and media studies scholars tend to foreground that the "term refers to a feature of fan fiction that is of central importance: the fact that it is consciously bound to its origin" (Pimenova 51). These scholars seek to liberate the term *derivation* from its history of suggesting texts that are "parasitic" (Holub 158) and "impure" (Cartmell and Whelean, *Screen Adaptation* 3), arguing that they intend to emphasize the presence and significance of the meta-text as the common thread that links all of fanfiction without implying false notions of hierarchy or unoriginality.

Suggesting to employ *derivation* as a means to simply denote an existing interrelationship and thus to liberate it of its evaluative use, theorists such as R. Black or Pimenova thus strive to provide an alternate reading to its prevailing pejorative use in both scholarship and "everyday speech" that Derecho describes when introducing and accounting for her redefinition of fanfiction as *archontic*:

[23] Nassim W. Balestrini's article discusses new developments in adaptation studies which are geared towards eliminating the former "orientation toward hierarchical evaluations" (4) that privileged the alleged 'original' text and claimed 'fidelity' as the most important category in the interrelation between adapted work and adaptation (also cf. Aragay, "Introduction" 11-22; Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation* 20-21; Hutcheon 85; Stam 54-62).

Although the findings of adaptation studies cannot be fully transposed to fan(fiction) studies—and the major theorist Linda Hutcheon even insists explicitly that fanfiction cannot be categorized as an adaptation, since there "is a difference between never wanting a story to end [...] and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways" (9)—, it remains important to note that the objectives of current adaptation research share some significant similarities with those of fan studies scholars. Adaptation studies, for example, is engaged in rethinking hierarchies in textual relationships and categories such as 'originality' and 'fidelity,' claiming the inherent value of works that were often dismissed as "secondary, derivative, unfaithful, a kind of creative fall from grace" (O'Flynn 84): As Hutcheon says in a statement whose essence could also apply to fanfiction, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary" (9).

On adaptations and adaptation studies, cf., for example: Balestrini, *Adaptation*; Balestrini, "Adaptation Studies"; Hutcheon; Stam; Sanders; Aragay, *Books in Motion*; Carroll; Cartmell and Whelehan, *Adaptations*; Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation*; Naremore.

> Although *derivative* and *appropriative* both imply intertextuality, an interplay between texts—one preceding and providing the basis for the other—these adjectives also announce property, ownership, and hierarchy. *Derivative*, when applied to artwork, has a negative connotation in everyday speech; it usually indicates a poor imitation or even a corruption of an original, pure work. Calling a text based on a prior text "derivative" thus signifies a ranking of the two texts according to quality and classifies the secondary text as the lesser one. Similarly, *appropriative* connotes "taking" and can easily be inflected to mean "thieving" or "stealing." To label the genre of fiction based on antecedent texts "derivative" or "appropriative," then, throws into question the originality, creativity, and legality of that genre. (64)

In light of this portrayal of the common view of derivation as "poor imitation," which casts doubt on the quality and origin of the "secondary text," it becomes obvious that derivation is nevertheless a difficult and complex category to apply to fanfiction.[24] Always at risk of falsely connoting a privileging of the meta-text and a devaluation of the amateur-produced stories, labeling the creative process at work within the genre *derivation* runs contrary to the fanauthors' struggle for claiming and demonstrating agency and fails to recognize the power they express in their activities: Their stories are not simply derived from another source but instead expand and negotiate the fictional universes in innovative ways, liberating themselves from the constraints of the meta-texts in both form and content. By "throw[ing] out everything that happened in the […] books" (queenbeezer) and creating a "very different" (MelissandreMelissandre) fictional universe, fans do not 'take' and 'thieve' and 'steal' (cf. Derecho 64). In their transformations of the meta-text, they instead transcend connotations of passivity, inferiority, and simplicity to create texts that institute them as authors in their own right and position them as powerful participants in the production of culture.

Contrary to what *derivation* implies, fanfiction writing is therefore not a one-way road—with a text that supplies and a text that takes; instead, the meta-text is a text that gets absorbed in the multiple fannish storylines and does not function as a ready-made resource to be exploited. While the meta-text has without doubt a powerful standing within the community and represents an important focal point, the web of fanfiction

[24] The complexity of applying the concept of *derivation* to fanfiction also becomes obvious when one considers, for example, legal issues connected to the genre. Although "the privilege of producing 'derivative works' that re-work or incorporate protected pre-existing texts generally is reserved to those who have obtained copyright permission" (Jaszi 40), the fact that jurists tend to classify fanfiction as derivative but simultaneously transformative puts the genre within "the gray area of copyright law" (Fiesler 737; also cf. Clerc 167-75) due to its "productive and non-threatening (even promotional)" (De Kosnik 122) nature. In the end, it is therefore the very term *derivation* that keeps fanfiction legally undefined and caught up in an intermediary position between permitted and needing permission.

stories is construed around more texts than just one. Easily, the fanfiction excerpts quoted at the beginning of the chapter could, for example, be amended by Author's Notes that mark the respective story as a "companion piece" (MsEstora) to another fan-created text instead of being directly and only derivative of the meta-text. Making the supposed 'source' almost obsolete, today's fanauthors frequently even write their stories without accessing the meta-text at all, basing their knowledge of the fictional universe on the stories and discussions within the fan community (cf. LaChev 85). Reworking the meta-text into a "collaborative, mutable thing constantly evolving rather than remaining a static closed object" (Coker 86), fans demonstrate a "fluid conception of 'text'" (B. Thomas, "Canons") that opposes both older and contemporary theories of simplistic derivation.

Evaluating the concept of *derivation* in fan studies and media studies together with a look towards adaptation studies literature, I thus conclude that it neglects to adequately represent fannish agency. First, it is apparently still too loaded with associations of qualitative inferiority, expressing a "moralistic stance" (O'Flynn 84) that off-handedly dismisses the emotional investment and creativity fans employ in their writing and thus wholly rejects both the fans' "work of love" (Kneale)[25] and their belief that there are "truly great stories out there" (JackPotr). Applying *derivative* to fanfiction fundamentally discredits the genre, even with new readings of the concept attempting to zero in on expressing the essence of fanfiction instead of judging its aesthetic quality and artistic integrity. Yet, even a more modern interpretation of *derivative* which focuses on the fact that the "design" of stories "is mediated through fans' understanding or interpretations of forms of media and popular culture that the fictions are based on" (R. Black, "Convergence" 132) cannot necessarily free itself from the all too common pejorative connotations. Secondly, as the stories themselves show, derivation as a means of conveying fanfiction's central concept oversimplifies the complex processes and relations in fanfiction, reducing the fanauthors to rewriters and re-users instead of signifying their true identities as active transformers and innovators (cf. Stein, "'Dratted Thing'" 247). As

[25] The fanauthors' emotional investment in their writing has led to fan studies referring to fanfiction as an affinity space, in which traditional denominators of a community such as ethnicity or class lose their significance in favor of a "common passion" its members/frequenters share (R. Black, "Digital Design" 117; R. Black, *Adolescents* 36-42; also cf. chapter 3.3.1). According to scholars of fanfiction, the feeling that "[f]anfic is, at its purest, an expression of love" (strina) even leads to the development of a "space that is more 'humane and democratic' than the everyday world. Brought together by their love of a particular [meta-text], these fans form alliances with others who may have different political, social, and economic backgrounds" (Pullen 53; also cf. Stein, "Subject").

indicated before, their agency is then shrouded by an assumption of simplicity and inactivity, misrepresenting the struggle fans have long been engaged in to claim their share of authority and power over the meta-text and their own textual products. Emphasizing the linear hierarchy of texts, derivation ultimately negates the genre's democratic nature of contribution and intervention, not accounting for the multi-dimensional and multi-directional influence fannish writing exerts on both their own texts and the meta-text. As such, theorizing fanfiction as derivative presents a danger to conceptions of the genre itself, whose members' main goals of appropriating the meta-text and participating in its interpretation and creation are set in binary opposition to the definitions *derivative* allows for.

The fans' desire to participate is one of the central findings Henry Jenkins discusses in his seminal *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, written just before the fandoms began moving online and so still based on their pre-Internet structures. As mentioned, it was this book which first drew academic attention to fans, attempting to initiate their reinterpretation from a group of "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers" (23) into "active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (24). Presenting fans no longer as leading a miserable existence at the margins of culture, Jenkins reframes them as textual poachers whose agency allows them to engage in an "ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings" (24) with the producers of the meta-text: Fanauthors, he says, are "selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures […] hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses" (27)—they produce stories that become a visible expression of their power and evidence of their appropriation of a fictional universe they did not invent but aver to have a share in due to their emotional connection and moral ownership. After all, as for example Hatteress demonstrates in the disclaimer for her *Supernatural* story "Humans Do It Better," it is distinctly their self-identification as fans that allows them to participate. Despite the fact, she writes, that "I don't own the show or the characters[,] I simply fangirl all over them and occasionally sling mud when I think they're treated badly." Simply put, it is Jenkins's conception of textual poaching Hatteress professes to practice: As a fan, she might not possess copyright of *Supernatural* but nevertheless feels to be its moral owner and protector of its fictional universe; she feels empowered to "sling mud" and writes fanfiction to improve the 'bad treatment' the characters receive in the meta-text.

Revolutionizing—or, virtually founding—fan studies, Jenkins's central theme of the fanauthor as a poacher is based on Michel de Certeau's 1984 questioning of the then-dominant "assimilation of reading to passivity" (169): The "activity of reading," as de Certeau writes, "has on the contrary all the characteristics of a silent production" and effects a "metamorphosis of the text […] by the wandering eyes of the reader" (xxi). With the idea of poaching, de Certeau proposes to challenge the "legend" of the "inertia of consumption," which is "necessary for the system that distinguishes and privileges authors, educators, revolutionaries, in a word, 'producers,' in contrast with those who do not produce" (167). He describes a society with fixed cultural hierarchies that sharply differentiates between a social elite of authors on the one hand and the mass of consumers on the other, attempting to resituate the reader in a mediating position as someone who "invents in texts something different from what [the producers] 'intended' […] and creates something un-known" from an "indefinite plurality of meanings" (169). The "text," in his words, "becomes a cultural weapon" (171), which is used by authors and readers to engage in a struggle for its dominance and ownership since both sides claim it to be their own space.

What is significant to note, however, is that de Certeau stops before acknowledging the full agency of readers and denies them any active production that goes beyond the "silent production" of interpretation—a fact that Jenkins later uses in his application and reinterpretation of de Certeau's theories to the *activities* of fanauthors. According to de Certeau, the actions of readers are limited to behaving like a "hunter in the forest" (173), who merely decides which path to follow instead of *creating* a path. In a powerful metaphor, which was to become immensely influential in fan studies,[26] he describes the allegedly impenetrable and unalterable boundary between an author who produces text and a reader who selects meanings from the ones available:

[26] The scholars who employ or relate to the concept of poaching in their research on fanfiction are by far too numerous to name. A small selection shall thus suffice to validate my claim of its omnipresence: Booth; R. Black, *Adolescents*; Sandvoss; Hills, *Fan Cultures*; Hills, "Not Just"; Hills and Williams; Bury, "Textual Poaching"; Murray; Cherry; Consalvo; Kazimierczak; Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction; Coker; Handley; Marx; A. Thomas; Carruthers; Isaksson, Falzone; B. Thomas, "Canons"; Andrejevic.

In addition, fans themselves use the idea of poaching to write about their activities: Cf., for instance, essays by Lucy Gillam ("Poaching") or E.Levine as examples of the abundant discussions on the genre fans engage in; also cf. Tezza1502's "The Consequences of Poaching" for an example of the concept figuring into the stories themselves. The term of *poaching*, as these references show, "has established itself in the critical vocabulary of fans and writers […]. For many of these […], writing fanfiction *is* textual poaching" (Parrish, "Metaphors").

> *Far from being writers*—founders of their own place, heirs of the peasants of earlier ages now working on the soil of languages, diggers of wells and builders of houses—*readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write*, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. (174; my emphasis; also cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24)

This passage, pointed as it is, contains both the central idea that would inspire Jenkins's concept of fannish poaching and, at the same time, the fundamental difference between his and de Certeau's theories: On the one hand, both scholars assume fans and other readers to exploit "fields they did not write," stressing that the text/the meta-text is not reader-/fan-produced but "belong[s] to someone else," i.e. has an author who can claim copyright protection due to being the "founde[r] of their own place." On the other hand, however, Jenkins's approach differs radically from de Certeau's emphasis on the "sharp separation between writers and readers," negating the latter's claims that the traveling reader's "meaning-production remains temporary and transient" (*Textual Poachers* 45): Instead of being limited to the "silent production" (de Certeau xxi) of reading, fans *are* writers—they are "all writing their own stories" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 154) and therefore continually produce textual evidence of their 'loud' reading and interpretation, i.e. their appropriation of and participation in the meta-text.[27] In fact, it is this very suspension of the difference between writing and reading that characterizes the genre of fanfiction, which has fans assume the persona of a fanwriter that amalgamates the two hitherto separate identities instead of keeping them apart as de Certeau insists on.

What consequentially makes Jenkins's theory of textual poaching so enormously significant for early fan studies is his recognition of the fact that fans are indeed active transformers of the meta-text who are not restricted in utilizing the "lands belonging to someone else" for their own purposes. Despite acknowledging that he finds de Certeau's "notions of textual poaching and nomadic reading particularly useful concepts for thinking about media consumption and fan culture" (*Textual Poachers* 44), Jenkins is adamant about the power of the fanauthors to escape from the limitations the French scholar imposes. "Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise," Jenkins writes, "the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural

[27] Apart from the stories which evidence that fannish meaning-making is not at all "temporary and transient," Jenkins elaborates on another criterion in which his idea of poaching differs from de Certeau's. In contrast to the latter, who "describes readers who are essentially isolated from each other," he stresses how fanfiction writing is a communal activity that shapes the meanings fans poach from the meta-text through continued reinterpretation in stories and discussions (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 45).

canons" (*Textual Poachers* 18), whereas for de Certeau a reader's activity is confined to a schoolchild's scrawling in the margins of his textbooks and the television viewer in particular "cannot write anything on the screen of his set" (31). Denying the virtually infantile consumer any real authority and chance to effect any change on the text, this passage in de Certeau's book cements the fundamental passivity of the audience Jenkins seeks to destroy by introducing the concept of a participatory culture: "De Certeau is wrong," he exclaims in consequence in his introduction to "four chapters […] on forms of cultural *production* characteristic of fandom" (*Textual Poachers* 155-56; my emphasis). His extensive elaborations on fanfiction and its genres in addition to fannish vidding (video-making) and filking (music-making) focus on how it is the productive and visible activity of fans that contradicts the readers' restriction to the virtual inactivity de Certeau proposes. Replacing passivity by activity and participation therefore marks *Textual Poachers* as a huge step in fan studies.

Redefining and reconstituting fans as fundamentally active, Jenkins's work thus signified a new understanding of fans' activities and productions: Theorizing fans as poachers acknowledged that while texts may have an author who created them in the first place, fans are still free to travel those lands and seize their riches and resources in order to rework what they find. It was the first time that "brainless consumers" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 10) were found to possess some measure of agency, which allows them to appropriate the meta-text and participate in the production of culture. So groundbreaking were the findings of *Textual Poachers* that the concept still remains highly influential, with both past and contemporary scholars employing Jenkins's 1992 language of fans as 'raiding peasants' (24-27)—often, as I discuss below, without acknowledging the changed realities and practices of fanfiction writing. Despite the fact that fannish agency surpasses the limits the concept implies, researchers nevertheless continue to engage in describing fanfiction as poaching, perpetuating Jenkins's belief that fans essentially "move across lands belonging to someone else" (de Certeau 174; also qtd. in Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24). "[P]oaching," as Paul Booth, for example, ascertains in 2010, "can only take place in a space of power prescribed by the producer, who strategically makes and inserts intended meanings into a text" (159), expressing an understanding of the meta-text and of the relation between author and reader that fans seem to have long overcome. Similarly, Brigid Cherry professes in a 2005 article to prefer the "poaching metaphor" because it

"acknowledges the role of people in using culture but concedes ownership to the companies. It accepts the boundaries" (68).

Yet, as this dissertation is set to argue, it is exactly these "boundaries" of "ownership" that fanfiction writing intends to disrupt: Fans do not steal from someone else's lands, "despoiling the wealth of Egypt" (de Certeau 174; also qtd. in Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24) by consuming the crop they find; instead, it is here that the image of the fan as poacher breaks down since the textual lands are not exhausted by fannish activities but enriched (cf. Andrejevic 42). Their goal is to bring about a "few improvements" (Goddess of the Multiverses) or "big changes" (Jedi Master Gigi) to make it "better" (Zombies8Me)—and not to leave the meta-text exhausted and despoiled. Fanfiction with its Alternate Universes,[28] its addition of "more dimension, mysteries, character growth, and romance, plus a female who kicks some ass and shakes up a familiar story" (Maat) may consequently be the answer to Paul J. Falzone's interrogation of Jenkins's concept that asks, "at what point does the poacher/producer cease to travel the lands of the master (narrative), and strike out into previously unexplored and/or unknown lands?" (252).

Fanauthors in their unbounded creativity do not only "travel the lands" of the meta-text but enhance and transform its fictional universe with quasi infinite storylines and "new version[s]" (maiybeen). Far from mere poaching, fanfiction writing is characterized by fans engaging in "textual liberation" (Coker 83-84; Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 7) that frees the meta-text from its limitations and augments it with alternative meanings and the participation of multiple voices. Jenkins's influential conceptualization of the genre did not acknowledge one of its fundamental realities: Fans refuse to accept the premise that comes with referring to their activities as *poaching*, i.e. that their activities are illegal, marginalized, and limited to what they find in the meta-text. Instead, they

[28] *Alternate Universe* (*AU*) stories are a highly popular subgenre of fanfiction writing that "cover a great deal of creative territory" ("Alternate Universe"): In these fan-texts the backgrounds of characters, for instance, may be radically altered or they may be transplanted to completely new settings in a drastic transformation of the fictional universe of the meta-text.

A common AU version of *Twilight*, for example, portrays all characters as human instead of them being vampires or werewolves. "Everyone is human," writes LeighK81 in the summary of her *Twilight* story "Misunderstood Decisions," which can consequently not be seen as mere poaching but as an enrichment of the meta-text by supplying it with another dimension.

create a "new, democratic model" (Coker 84)[29] that destructs the confines of poaching as it, first, refutes its superior hierarchical position of the meta-text as the supplier of all meaning, and secondly, permits the audience to participate in the process of meaning-making and to be represented in the text. Fannish agency is the keyword that Jenkins's work of 1992 lacks, with few researchers acknowledging this central factor to the extent it deserves even in contemporary scholarship. Poaching has not yet had to yield its position as one of the main ideas scholars harbor in regard to fanfiction, and although attempts were made to substitute the term *textual poachers* by different labels,[30] these little heeded re-designations have been of little consequence and none of them truly reflects the power and authority fans exert over the meta-text or expresses the fannish claim to participation in the production of culture.

A term that stays within the realm of Jenkins's metaphor, *textual gamekeepers*, for example, was introduced to fan studies by the works of Matt Hills (*Fan Cultures* 36-41; "Not Just" 111-14) and Rhiannon Bury ("Textual Poaching" 290-94). Although the label assigns fans some measure of agency, the extent of their agency remains very much limited and thus misrepresents fannish activities and the power they claim and display in their writing. While fans can here be active, the two readings are founded on the presence of a restrictive author persona, who reserves for him-/herself the ultimate superiority: In similar fashion to textual poaching, both Hills's and Bury's notions of textual gamekeeping emphasize the fans' dependency on the producers of the meta-text, who are construed as all-powerful since they either provide the—decidedly limited—space for fannish activities or the "'right' […] meaning" (Bury, "Textual Poaching" 292) that is to be extracted by the fannish gamekeepers. Certainly no poachers content with picking up breadcrumbs in foreign lands, fans can consequently not be confined to functioning as gamekeepers of the meta-text, who may be given a sense of power by the owners of the

[29] Catherine Coker goes so far as to proclaim fans to be "latter-day Robin Hoods, [who] steal from the rich (corporations) to give to the poor (other fans)" (84)—a reading which I find exaggerated in its emphasis on charity since fans do not create stories because of some altruistic motive but because their writing arises from a powerful desire to participate and disrupt the hegemony of producers. If one wants to stay with the metaphor of fans as Robin Hood, I argue that fandom rather reflects Sara Gwenllian Jones's reading that elevates fans to the "status of modern-day Robin Hoods, folk heroes busily snatching back 'our' popular cultural texts from the greedy global conglomerates who claim to own them" ("Web Wars" 163).

[30] As Juli Parrish summarizes, a "number of other metaphors for the notion of the fan have been suggested" since 1992, among them "minstrel," "performer," "steward," "pilgrim," "apprentice," or "puppeteer." Far from being complete, this "list goes on" but no term has ever "managed to shift the central idea of the textual poacher" ("Metaphors").

lands but still rely on them in a position defined through its hierarchical subordination: After all, gamekeepers are no proprietors—and fans no mere courted consumers whose agency is restricted to participating in producer-led and producer-initiated activities, or an audience who engages in "'respectful' reading" practices in which the "textual turf remain[s] relatively untrammeled" (Bury, "Textual Poaching" 291).[31]

Despite introducing the idea of fandom as a "participatory culture" to fan studies, neither Jenkins's concept of poaching nor its later resignification as gamekeeping are accordingly suitable to discuss the extent of fannish participation and agency as witnessed in today's online spaces and, as in the case of *Supernatural*, the first meta-texts. Curtailing fannish contribution to "intervention and active appropriation" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 155) instead of recognizing how their "actions and creations call into question the limits of ownership" (Consalvo 69), Jenkins's seminal conceptualization of fans[32] can, on the one hand, hardly be underestimated for redefining fandom and bringing it to academic

[31] While some fans, as Hills rightly argues, indeed move in spaces created for them by the producers of the meta-text—and thus in supervised and narrow spaces such as forums owned by TV channels (36-38; also cf. Felschow; Ross 71-123)—, the large majority frequents fan-owned, fan-designed, and fan-specific archives, blogs, or journals, where they engage in non-supervised and non-authorized displays of their agency. Fanfiction stories, for instance, are posted to *FanFiction.Net*, *LiveJournal*, or the *Archive of Our Own* (which self-advertises as a "fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive for transformative fanworks") but hardly ever appear on websites targeted to control fans.

Bury, in turn, limits textual gamekeeping to a group of fans who she finds to be "invested in mining the text collectively for the 'right' (i.e., authorial) meaning" ("Textual Poaching" 292): Their discussions of the TV show *Six Feet Under* are marked by a belief in Barthes's "Author-God" (*Image* 146; qtd. in Bury 292), which self-imposes a tight rein on creativity and agency. Fanfiction writing as a means of "ma[king] up my own script about it" (iolaaa) and changing "Names, Places, Ages, Dates, and Times […] to fit the story parameters" (Kemq) would not be tolerated among these fans, which disqualifies Bury's understanding of gamekeeping as a signifier of agency for the purposes of this thesis. In respect to Bury's interpretation of fannish activities, also cf. obsession_inc's differentiation of affirmational and transformational fandom, which I discuss in chapter 3.

[32] While Jenkins—influential and "prolific as hell" ("Who the &%&#") as he is—has in the meantime developed and expanded his ideas on fannish activities, his metaphor of the poacher has had an impact on fan studies that his subsequent works have hardly been able to match. Nevertheless, he remains easily the most important figure in the field, with his studies reaching a wide audience and pushing both fan and media studies in new directions. The last few years have, for instance, seen his publication of further explorations of participatory culture (*Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*; Jenkins and Kelley, *Reading in a Participatory Culture*), a study on transmedia storytelling (*Convergence Culture*) and, most recently, a book on how the flow of content online is reshaping the media landscape (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*). In addition, Jenkins blogs regularly on his widely-read *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, which has developed into a meeting space for fan studies scholars to discuss the field; or, in his own words: "This blog is a place where I share my thoughts about many contemporary developments and publish my works in progress. […] And it is a place where I spotlight interesting work in the field of media studies which may be relevant to a readership that includes not only academics but also journalists, educators, industry insiders, policy makers, fans and gamers" ("Who the &%&#").

attention; on the other hand, as this dissertation shows, evidence of fannish strategies within their writing and their increasing participation in production processes suggests an extent of power and agency neither Jenkins nor more recent applications of his model can account for. Fans shape and create, they expand and enrich, they claim ownership and authority, they liberate texts and deconstruct hierarchies—they are "We, the fans" (hazel-3017), active and democratic producers instead of "nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write" (de Certeau 174; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24).

2.2.2 The Fanfiction Story-Tree: A Metaphor for the Authority of the Meta-Text

1992 was a significant year for fan studies as it saw the publication of two of the most important and influential texts that were to define the field for years to come despite their situatedness in fandom's offline days. Although dwarfed by the impact and long-lasting sway of Jenkins's *Textual Poachers*, Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* presents a still much referred to in-depth ethnographic study of a group of women fanfiction writers who engage in the "subversive act" of "produc[ing] a massive body of literature, art, and criticism about their favorite television and movie characters" (3). Mainly charting the activities, rituals, and identity constructions of a small community of *Star Trek* fanauthors, *Enterprising Women* also introduces a draft of a theory of fanfiction that was never as elaborate or prolific as Jenkins's contemporaneous poaching metaphor[33] but may function, I claim, as a possible precursor to Derecho's theory of fanfiction as archontic literature in mitigating—but not yet eliminating—the idea of the genre as based on simple vertical intertextuality. Contrary to portrayals of fanfiction as derivative or poaching, Bacon-Smith introduces the "story tree" metaphor as means to analyze the structure of fannish production (63-66), which has the decisive advantage of diverting some attention from the meta-text and highlighting the extent and outreach of the fictional universe created by the stories.

With the image quasi speaking for itself, the story tree as defined by Bacon-Smith in *Enterprising Women*, "may include stories, poems, pieces of artwork, or novels

[33] In regard to the difference in the impact of the two works, it needs to be conceded that Bacon-Smith's study is much more a child of its pre-Internet times than Jenkins's. Even in the mid-2010s, *Textual Poachers* appears less dated in wording, outreach, and findings, with Jenkins focusing on the definition of the genre and the conceptualization of the activities of its participants, whereas Bacon-Smith follows closely the interaction, language, and productions of the specific community she singled out for research (cf. her section on methodology 299-305).

connected to each other by plot as well as characters and settings but which do not necessarily fall in a linear sequence" (63). The meta-text, in her model, functions as a "root story" that contains "unresolved situations, secondary characters whose actions during the main events are not described, or a resolution that is unsatisfactory to some readers" (63), offering the fanauthors the chance to "branch out from that story, completing dropped subplots, [or] exploring the reactions of minor characters to major events" (63).[34] Looking at a rather small selection of stories from the *Star Trek* fandom, Bacon-Smith nevertheless identifies a number of significant characteristics of fanfiction writing that make her idea so compelling for consideration in the focus of this thesis. While never addressing the subject of fannish power and agency, she concentrates on the non-linear connection between different fan stories and the "root story," emphasizing a structural viewpoint that, on the one hand, has little to do with the relation between fans and producers, and, on the other, can be read as an early allusion to fanfiction as a democratic genre and archive that dismisses the meta-text's hierarchical superiority so expressly present in Jenkins's poaching theory.

Underlining that the story tree with its large and small branches "may have one author or many" (63), Bacon-Smith describes how "[f]anwriters tend to write from the assumption that there are as many stories as there are people in the scene to see the events and interpret them," since "[s]eeing things from more than one angle is intrinsic to fan fiction" (65). "Traditional closure," she writes, "doesn't make sense" (64) to fanauthors, who thus cannot accept the meta-text as finite and final. The notion of a

> linear story with a single narrative perspective per scene is so alien to this group [i.e. the small community Bacon-Smith studies] that they use their fiction to "correct" the error of linearity in the source products. The fanwriters see life as a sea of potentialities, many of which can be realized simultaneously, many of which spread out like ripples across the lives of others, and all of which must

[34] A fairly similar description of fanfiction was put forward by Jenkins in an article on *Star Trek* fans first published in 1988 but was not followed through in his *Textual Poachers*, although his earlier piece served as the latter's "rough draft" ("*Star Trek* Rerun" 37). In "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten," he describes how fanfiction "transform[s] *Star Trek* into a 'never-ending story.' Fan fiction marches forward through a series of digressions as new speculations cause the writers to halt the advance of their chronicles to introduce events that 'must have occurred' prior to the start of their stories or to introduce secondary plotlines that pull them from the main movement of the event chain" (49).

Interestingly, the 1988 version of his article contains a brief passage referring to the little-noted *New York Times*-piece "Spock among the Women" written by Bacon-Smith in November 1986, where she already includes her 1992 definition of a fanfiction story tree almost verbatim. This reference, however, is not incorporated in the 2006 reprint of "*Star Trek* Rerun" I quote from here.

> somehow be encompassed in the literature if it is to express any kind of truth. (66)

What Bacon-Smith's model of the story tree therefore achieves is the construction of a fictional archive that distinctly includes and values the fan-texts as important and relevant due to the alternative perspectives, continuations, and backgrounds they provide. She shows how the community expands the fictional universe initiated by the meta-text in multiple ways, deconstructing the myth of the static, finite, and determinate text. "Fanfic," as fans assert, "rarely sits still. It's like a living, evolving thing" (Kim Bannister qtd. in Jenkins, "Reading" 140); the "what-if moment" (Parrish, "Metaphors") of fanfiction presents what would have happened "when [the protagonists] left and no one tried to stop them" (browneyedchick) and what "if Mary hadn't died" (Ninjana). The story tree thus constitutes a useful model in theorizing some of the structural characteristics of fanfiction, accounting for the simultaneity of stories since there are always "many alternate endings" (CharlotteHolmes), a "new version of the pilot episode" (estrafalaria103, "Unnatural") or "a variety of different points of view" (Relwot). Moreover, the image of the story tree comprises a possibility to represent the fact that fan-texts have widely differing degrees of connection to the meta-text and may be far removed from the "root story," retaining only the most superficial of ties: "This story," as Page Library Page writes in her Author's Notes for one of her *Supernatural* fanfictions, "ignores practically everything" and "Blink" by McGee42 is "extremely AU," i.e. its alternate universe maintains hardly any discernible link to *Twilight*.

Despite this applicability of the story tree image to fanfiction writing, two features characterize Bacon-Smith's theory that together yield an inaccurate interpretation of the genre and thus have scholars remain skeptic about working with it for their research. First, as Daria Pimenova rightly notes, "even branches do not depict the interconnecting character of fan fiction fully, because each branch […] is still separated from the others, a division that does not hold for fan fiction texts" (50). Retaining a degree of linearity through its use of the metaphor of the tree, the story tree cannot suitably represent the infinite fictional universe of fanfiction, which is rather a multi-dimensional space with manifold defined and undefined links between its texts. Although fanauthors frequently call attention to a specific moment of the meta-text they render "new and improved" (Einstein-Wannabe) or compose a "fanfic for a fanfic" (bellaBBblack)—and thus allude to the retention of some degree of linearity between stories—, they nevertheless disrupt the

direct dependency the story tree suggests by combining and interlocking their texts and the meta-text in intricate ways that in the end eliminate the notions of linearity and neatly separated texts: Writing an "alternative take on Skag Trendy's 'Shades of Night' universe," Paige M. Carter, for example, explicitly refers to a story trilogy by another author, who in turn references a wide variety of texts her fanfiction is linked to and so makes it impossible to preserve the story tree metaphor with its straight and separated branches.[35] The multiplicity of connections, both mentioned and implied, suggests a wide universe their readers need to be familiar with to be able to follow the stories and orient themselves in the vast space of texts that come together skag trendy's trilogy and Paige M. Carter's "alternative take." Positioning both their creations in an indefinable in-between, these fanwriters therefore demonstrate how a model that is characterized by an emphasis on hierarchical structures—no matter if these suggest a linear dependency between fanfiction stories and the meta-text or between individual fanfiction stories—must fall short of representing the genre in all its complexity.[36]

Furthermore, the stress put on these hierarchical and separated connections leads to another shortcoming of the story tree metaphor, which cannot be upheld in contemporary fanfiction writing with its emphatically asserted fannish agency and power. Assigning the label "root story" to the meta-text unduly confers essential significance to the text that admittedly "gives an initial impetus" (Pimenova 49) to the activities of the fannish community but certainly does not inspire all the writing fanauthors engage in. The meta-text does not have the central relevance Bacon-Smith posits when fans, for instance, create a story that presents "Devorah's POV [point of view] from my wonderful friend Alice's

[35] skag trendy created a *Supernatural* alternate universe, which is told from one of the protagonists' point of view and has some references to seasons one and two, although "the circumstances have been completely altered" ("Hunter Of The Shadows book 2"). In addition, she acknowledges that her *beta*-readers Jen Burch and Sendintheclowns have contributed to the trilogy; moreover, she was "influenced" by author Kelly Armstrong and by the TV shows *Angel* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* ("Hunter Of The Shadows"). She claims that one needs to have read the fanfic "Let the Red Mist Descend" as a necessary background for her three stories ("Hunter of the Shadows Book 3"), and last but not least, she references the "very sexy Hugh Jackman" as inspiration for one of her original characters and attributes the title of the series to a song by Metallica ("Hunter Of The Shadows").

Aside from connections to other parts of the fictional universe not explicitly listed, these overtly named links to other stories, the meta-text, and non-fanfiction texts and people visualize the multi-dimensionality of fanfiction writing, which cannot at all be confined to linear sequences.

[36] While the story tree metaphor is not a very well-known concept within fandom, fans nevertheless sometimes use the term to describe stories that are linearly connected, thus underlining this one-dimensionality as one of the central features of Bacon-Smith's theory: Trialia, for example, explains that she wrote "Dizzy Infinite" for thefannishwaldo's "Valentine's story tree" in which "the last word of the previous comment-fic must be the first word of the next one."

[…] fic ‘Behind Closed Doors’” (IzzyandDesRoxSox), which relegates the meta-text to a minor factor in this fanfiction’s genesis, or when fans write stories that do not at all draw on the meta-text since they entered their “fandoms through fanfic instead of by watching or reading the [meta-]text” (Wright 49; also cf. LaChev 85; Pimenova 53): “I have not read the Jedi Quest series, so since this is a very AU story we shall just ignore it,” Maerthorwen of Atlantis confidently introduces her *Star Wars* story “Padawan Years” with, suggesting to her readers in a subsequent chapter to “just attribute the differences [to the meta-text] to the fact this is AU.”

Liberating themselves from the idea that the meta-text is the “root” or source of their writing, fanauthors prove the genre to be devoid of a hierarchical positioning of texts, valuing each writer and story for their participation and enlargement of the fictional universe regardless of the nature of the relation between fanfiction and meta-text. A *Twilight* story that “isn’t about the twilight characters“ (Booklover1994) seems to defy the genre’s basic definition but in truth merely substantiates that fannish writing—in a direct counterstatement to the image of the story tree—proves to be “larger than its source” (Pimenova 49). Besides not accounting for the nature and extent of the connections that are at work within fandom, Bacon-Smith’s theory of a “root story” that functions as the nourishment for all its branches thus denies fans the power and agency they demonstrate in their writing. The story tree with its “root” originating outside of fandom thus becomes a metaphor for the authority of the meta-text and discounts not only fannish creativity and ingenuity in assuming their inherent dependency on an ‘original’ but also their “liberties taken” (TheSouthernScribe)—with fans putting decisive emphasis on *taken* instead of *given*, *granted*, or *permitted*. Escaping the narrow confines of the story tree image, fanauthors continuously display how an emphasis on the meta-text misrepresents their having taken control of its fictional universe, expanding and filling it with their texts and contributions to alter it for good.

Despite these obvious inadequacies in characterizing fannish agency and activities, last but not least it needs to be acknowledged that Bacon-Smith’s model of fanfiction was the first to analyze the fictional universe of the meta-text as a space that can grow beyond its “root,” which enables my reading of her ideas as a precursor to a much more applicable theory of fanfiction as “archontic literature.” First put forward almost fifteen years after *Enterprising Women*, Derecho’s conceptualization of the genre reconstructs fanfiction as an expanding archive, which theorizes the stories as laterally and contemporaneously co-

existent (also cf. O'Flynn 85-87; Hutcheon xiii) and thus stands in marked contrast to Bacon-Smith's earlier model. It is Derecho's elimination of the remnants of a relatively vertical intertextuality dependent on the meta-text which makes for the central significance of her ideas in regard to the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation and provides the basis for my definition of the genre as a democratic archive devoid of hierarchical structures. Thinking fanfiction as an archive enlarged with every story, every post, every review—in short, every voice of a community member—has decisively pushed scholarly representation of the fannish practices in another direction, promoting the decreasing weight of the meta-text in favor of valuing the contribution of fans and enabling them to expand the extent of their participation.

2.2.3 The Power and Limits of Dialogic Intertextuality in Fanfiction

Aside from Derecho's rather influential model that focuses on the expansionist drive of fanfiction, the urge to eliminate vertical intertextuality spawned another important theory that focuses on the genre's communicative and collaborative aspect and so reduces the impact of the meta-text. Becoming gradually more aware of the participation of multiple fannish voices in the construction of the fan-text, fan studies researchers have gone back to Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogic writing as put forward, for example, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* or *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, instrumentalizing his theories of the early 20th century to describe fannish practices in the Web 2.0 era. Despite "the difficulties of using Bakhtin's work" since "it has been appropriated for a variety of conflicting purposes," as Rachel Shave writes in an article that applies his concept of carnival to slash fanfiction, she points out how it "may well be Bakhtin's willingness to embrace fluidity and multiplicity that has enabled his work to be appropriated for such wide-ranging usage" and which may also make it applicable to fanfiction; it functions, she asserts, as an "'empowering model' […] because Bakhtin finds difference and multiplicity exhilarating rather than threatening."

Despite Shave's emphasis on the possibility to use Bakhtin's work as an "'empowering model,'" which signifies the value of his conception of dialogic writing in the context of this dissertation, his thoughts on the presence of multiple voices in a piece of text have hardly ever played a role in studying fannish claims to agency. While

increasingly referred to in research on fanfiction, Bakhtin rather merely serves to elucidate a fundamental characteristic of the genre, i.e. the collaboration between numerous fanauthors on their stories (cf., for example, B. Thomas, "Canons"; Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 116-42; Brough and Shrestova; Busse and Hellekson, "Introduction" 7). "This one is for you CASCADIA," writes, for instance, Shannz in her Author's Notes quoted at the beginning of the chapter, displaying her gratitude for the input her fellow fanauthor rendered: "Thanks so much for all your help and encouragement on this fic […]. Your advice is always sound and very honest. I've appreciated it more than you know." In a similar vein, Mad Server introduces her story "There Is No You There Is Only Me" by an extensive note to members of the community, appreciating everything they contributed to improve her fanfiction: "Great big thank yous to betas fleshflutter, who caught OOC bits […]; NewspaperTaxis, who found confusing parts and questionable spellings […]; and Hanson's Angel, who […] gave me a ton of shiny love and support. You guys rock!!"

Fanfiction, as these brief statements evidence, is a genre—or a culture even—based on dialogue and communication among the fanauthors, with everyone relying on advice or input for their stories or simply engaging in discussions about the meta-text or the fan-texts. "[W]e talk all the time," asserts ShadisticArchdevil in a post on *FanFiction.Net*'s forum "Coming together and Helping Out," pointing towards the presence—and significance—of a multitude of voices that participate in the genesis of a single story. Dialogue is the key word in fanfiction on all levels: Not only do fanwriters work together in the writing process, negotiating their understanding of the meta-text and the fan-texts, but the contemporaneous presence of countless texts—fan-produced or not—leads to an intense exchange between the different perspectives and perceptions they express. Fans, as Parrish contends in reference to Robert Frost's 1916 poem "The Road not Taken" never embody the figure of "Frost's traveler, faced with an irreversible choice, never to happen again on the road not taken" ("Back" 186); they can always come back and seek out a different alternative by writing or reading another story that that thus enters the dialogue engendered by the multiplicity of the fan-texts.

Defined by this "multivocality of borderless communication" (Pimenova 53) taking place between and among both stories and authors, fanfiction thus functions as a prime counterexample to the Romantic ideal of a "solitary artist scribbling away in an unheated garret" (Scafidi 12) or the conception of the "speaker as the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time"

(Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 93), since fan-texts are never productions of an individual, created in isolation or detachment from the fannish community and its texts. The result of various fans' contributions—either expressly or through the contact of its writer(s) with other fan-texts—, a story by contrast always symbolizes the genre's communal collaboration and continual dialogue in presenting multiple voices; it never belongs to the one person who may have written its text and published it: As fanauthors continuously affirm, "once you have posted your work online, it is no longer solely yours any longer, but belongs to the community as a whole" (Schnickledooger; also cf. La Lunatique Fanatique). Profusely exhibited online, this practice of collaborative writing—i.e. the inclusion of and negotiation between different voices in the creation of a story text—has given rise to employing Bakhtin's theories to characterize fanfiction as a dialogic genre which seeks to integrate manifold participants and opinions instead of solely relying on the meta-text as a 'source.' Dispersing the notion of a strictly vertical and one-way intertextuality still present in earlier theories of derivation, poaching, or the story tree, I accordingly argue that the concept of Bakhtinian dialogue as applied by fan studies can be utilized to approach questions of agency and the distribution of power within fanfiction as it sets out to do justice to one of the central features of the genre—namely its marked emphasis on the involvement and visibility of the many.

Apart from attesting the intensity of communal interaction in creating stories, the primacy of dialogue and communication in fanfiction (cf., for example, Wright; Pimenova 52-55; Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 7; Coker 91; Handley 101-02; R. Black, "Language" 177-78; Menon 383, A. Thomas 230-37) can moreover be read as a postmodern destruction of the single authorial voice in a powerful act of redistributing agency from Barthes's "Author-God" (*Image* 146) to the numerous members of the fanfiction community. Emphasizing polyphony and heteroglossia in its attempt to draw in the multiplicity of voices coming together in writing fanfiction, a Bakhtinian approach to the genre stresses participation and simultaneously negates the claims of the producers of the meta-text who tend to portray themselves as quasi divine creators that transform the void into text: In the collaborative environment of fannish writing, they are deprived of the opportunity of invoking 'originality' in producing meta-texts and thus lose the privilege of authority they ascribe to their alleged act of 'creation.' Since the author in a dialogic set-up, be he/she non-fannish or fannish, can never identify as "the biblical Adam" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 93) or the "point of origin" (Barthes, *Image* 142), but is only one among

the voices that make up a text and has a share in its production, agency can thus no longer be constructed as depending on originality and invention—accordingly, it needs to derive from other factors such as transformation and collaboration. Accentuating the dialogic interaction among the fanauthors and the incessant presence of "support and criticism and feedback" (Boingogirl) consequently provides a theory to underscore the fannish belief in the absurdity of the idea that all power rests within the hands of the producers of the meta-text—individuals who resist cooperation and outside or fannish influence. Stripping the producers of the meta-text of their argument that they singularly created the text and its fictional universe thus reframes fans from members of the audience who might infringe on someone else's copyright into active participants and contributors to the polyphonic dialogic text.

Using Bakhtin to interpret power as arising from the collaborative aspect of fanfiction, this thesis thus utilizes his revolutionizing ideas about the polyphonic nature of writing, i.e. the "presence of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (*Problems* 6) within a text. Moreover, reworking his thoughts in the context of fan studies to represent fannish agency relies on his early formulation of a theory of intertextuality[37] based on the fact that the "living utterance […] cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads" (*Dialogic Imagination* 276), which additionally contributes to the multiplicity of voices, opinions, and perspectives—or, heteroglossia[38]—in any piece of writing. Bakhtinian thought, both in the way it appears in in his own writings and in its influence on intertextuality as defined by Kristeva and other scholars, therefore heavily

[37] Although Bakhtin never uses the word *intertextuality*, his ideas are nevertheless considered precursors to later theories of intertextuality as initiated by Julia Kristeva. Referring to Bakhtin's work in her influential essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva explains that he was "one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to another structure" (35-36), even though scholars such as Manfred Pfister consider his concept of dialogue to be foremost intratextual, i.e. confined to different voices in *one* text ("Konzepte" 4-5).

[38] Defined as "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (*Dialogic Imagination* 324), heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin, mainly "enter[s] the novel" in the coming together of different types of speech such as "[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters" (*Dialogic Imagination* 263); it thus becomes a term to refer to a "dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages" (Maybin 67) that in fanfiction reveals itself most obviously in the incorporation of verbatim reproduced parts of the meta-text or songs (in so-called *songfics*) but also in the explicitly marked collaboration between individual authors. Cf., for example, a study by Angela Thomas, in which she looks at a fanfiction writing project between fanauthors Tiana and Jandalf and concludes that the finalized text preserves "their separate voices, and the story can be seen through the eyes of both" (233).

impacts constructing fanfiction as a dialogic genre and provides a useful approach to theorizing fannish claims of agency.

Before I discuss the multiple levels of intertextual dialogue in the genre in their depth, it needs to be noted, however, that fanfiction presents itself as a form of literature that in fact transcends both Bakhtinian dialogue and intertextuality by, first, its distinct emphasis on collaboration and negotiation on *all* levels of writing and, secondly, the complex status of the meta-text in reference to how theories of intertextuality position the "pre-text" (Müller 109; Pfister, "How" 218), i.e. the 'source' or the 'text that came before.' As this subchapter demonstrates in the following, fanfiction's dialogue is not at all restricted to Bakhtin's polyphonic and heteroglot struggle of different discourses in one single text, but occurs on several levels within one text, multiple texts, and different kinds of texts, all the while integrating a variety of participants. Moreover, the continuous negotiation of perspectives in stories or among fans denies the meta-text the status of functioning as a single frame of reference and has it represent just one voice among the many within the fictional universe of the fandom. As all stories continuously reference each other and relate to the overarching 'concept' fandom has created of the meta-text with its stories instead of the meta-text itself, fanfiction's 'intertextuality' thus rather corresponds to Paul Booth's conception of "intra-textuality," in which the assembled multitude of texts cannot be thought of as separate entities that refer to each other but instead becomes a "complete, whole, and unified entit[y], defined by the connections within internal elements" (57)—an archive, as I conclude at a later point of this thesis.

In his thoughts on the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin explains how "ultimate dialogicality" can only occur when a text appears as a "whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses" (*Problems* 18), i.e. when the voices that comprise the parts of the dialogue engage in negotiation as if the "*people in it were still arguing*" (*Problems* 39). Despite his emphasis on the "*people*" behind the "several consciousnesses," Bakhtin's conception of dialogue remains restricted to a purely textual, that is, intratextual, or text-internal (Pfister, "Konzepte" 4-5) level—remains a metaphor, as Daria Pimenova would argue (54-55) since the text's author[39] consciously inscribes the different voices and

[39] What needs to be noted here is the fact that Bakhtin's dialogue—conceptualized in the early 20th century—"retains a subject behind the text" (Pimenova 53), since the authorial subject constructs heteroglossia and polyphony by allowing the different voices to speak (*Problems* 6; *Dialogic Imagination* 263) and thus maintains "authority over his text" (Pfister, "How" 210). This belief in the figure of the author is no longer upheld in later writings on intertextuality and/or postmodernity such as Kristeva's and

therefore functions as their source without representing active and factual dialogue between separately existing entities: Bakhtin looks at the text as printed but not at the plethora of texts and discourses surrounding it. As such, he neglects to see that dialogue occurs on levels beyond the different speech types to be found in novels and the conflicting perspectives they may portray (*Dialogic Imagination* 263, 311-24), although he rightly acknowledges that dialogue constitutes a "universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general, everything that has meaning and significance" (*Problems* 40). Only hinted at in Bakhtin's writings, this concept of the omnipresence of negotiation and interaction far beyond a purely text-internal level in fact "ceases to be a metaphor" (Pimenova 54) in fanfiction, transcending the fundamentally symbolic nature of the ongoing 'arguments' Bakhtin determined as characteristic for dialogic novels. In recollection and appreciation of fans' emphatic evocation of "we talk all the time" (ShadisticArchdevil), the genre proves itself to be an "ideal example of Bakhtin's dialogue 'in action'" (Pimenova 55), asserting the significant presence of polyphony and heteroglossia in the fan-text that encompasses the meta-text, fannish collaborative writings, and fans' discussions and conversations.

Communal dialogue "in action" has been a defining feature of fanfiction since the genre first appeared in the late 1960s, with scholars such as Russ, Jenkins, and Bacon-Smith stressing the tightly-knit community life and the "intense interaction" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 53) within fandom. As discussed in the following, fannish communication and exchange is multi-dimensional, including the meta-text, its producers, fellow fanauthors, and the stories themselves to constitute dialogue as a practice at the core of fannish life and far from a "metaphor" (Pimenova 54). As identifying as a fan first entails a strong emotional relationship to the object of fandom (cf. Busse, "Fan" 386;

Barthes's; both assert the text to be productive without an authorial subject (Allen 39; Booth 50; Pfister, "Konzepte" 8-9) and that "[w]riting is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (Barthes, *Image* 142). Instead, postmodern thinking substitutes the author by the reader who becomes the focus of multiple meanings and the active agent in the dialogic processes between text and audience (Barthes, *Image* 148; Iser; Holub 152; Fish).

Both of these conceptions, however, prove rather problematic in their application to fanfiction since the genre has never differentiated between readers and writers in the best tradition of Barthes's requirement that "one try to abolish […] the distance between reading and writing" (*Image* 162). The conflation of both identities in the figure of the fanauthor thus proves once more how fanfiction transcends Bakhtinian thinking and its subsequent usage in writings on intertextuality: It is neither one author who inscribes heteroglossia nor the reader who allows for polyphonic interpretations of the text; rather the writer/reader fan community is the source of the inherent "ultimate dialogicality" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 18) of the genre, dissolving the single authorial entity into a plurality of voices of fanauthors/fanreaders.

Felschow; Bury, "Textual Poaching" 293),[40] it thus goes almost without saying that, on a first level, the meta-text serves as a constant topic of communication. Fanauthors engage in its interpretation, continually exchanging perspectives and negotiating their views in detailed discussions in personal meetings, at fan conventions, in online forums, in stories, or within their reviews or Author's Notes. Whether there are plot developments in an episode of *Supernatural* whose outcome "split the fandom" (Sakurafox666) or whether fans seek to answer if "there's plenty of evidence on the show to illustrate that Dean is far from stupid" (sparkycola1)—fandom subjects the meta-text to intense interrogation, spawning hour-long or novel-length dialogues that contemplate all possible angles the meta-text may suggest, support, or reject. Talking about the meta-text is a powerful practice fans "*need* to fuel our speculations, form our theories, feed our hopes, and calm our fears" (Angua).

In a second step, fans turn to the authors of the meta-text to commit them to discussing issues of fannish interest with them, trying to intercept the one-sided production process and to create room for their own voices. Although particularly receptive to fans' opinions and complaints, *Supernatural*'s executive producer Eric Kripke, for example, regularly has to stand interrogation in regard to the 'why's?' and 'how's?' of the show, with dialogues taking place at conventions, in stories addressed to him (sciencegeek51; Tidia), and other venues such as Alaya Dawn Johnson's "Open Letter to Eric Kripke," in which she addresses a problematic issue in the meta-text: Complaining about the absence of African-American women and the portrayal of African-American men, rare as it is, as "tragically evil," she suggests to him that a "richer, fuller, more completely-evoked America with black people and Native Americans and Asians and other people of color (and more women who don't only exist as sexual objects) would *make* Supernatural *even better.*" Dialogue, as these instances show, is a concept so deeply ingrained in the fan community that they do not hesitate to engage the producers of the meta-text, committing them to a "discussion of control—a control of characters, a control of worlds" (Coker 91), in which they stand their ground without giving in in fear of being intimated by the producers, or, as they often call them, by *TPTB*/The Powers That Be.

[40] The fans' intense "emotional attachment to the text" (Bury, "Textual Poaching" 303) and the "emotional investments" (Jenkins, "Cultural Logic" 35) they make in devoting their time to reading, watching, and discussing the meta-text in addition to creating fanfiction about it refutes an earlier belief about popular culture, which was said to inspire only superficial engagement without any significant emotional relation between the consumer and the consumed object (Fluck 41).

Disputing the metaphorical nature of Bakhtin's conception of dialogue in another realm, fannish collaboration also takes place on the level of story production. It is, as Pimenova explains, "primarily through dialogue that […] fan fiction writers find their ideas and inspiration. This multivocality of borderless communication then finds its representation in their texts" (53). Fans work together on their projects, with several members of the community contributing to the process of writing—either in the function of authors or *beta*-readers, i.e. 'editors' or 'advisors,' or as reviewers whose feedback causes the writer to decide to "better come back and add this in" (blue peanut m and m). Fanfiction stories are thus created in a dialogic and interactive mode, representing a prime example of polyphony in their convergence of a "multitude of voices" that "encourage constant conversation between the simplistic interpretation of the source text [...] and the more complex interpretations spoken for in fanfiction" (Kaplan 150).

Alluded to in Deborah Kaplan's emphasis of the "constant conversation" between fans in the production of stories, the dialogue between the fan-texts themselves signifies an additional level of negotiation and exchange of alternative opinions. Far from one story presenting a 'fan-authorial' character interpretation, plot twist, or perception of the meta-text, the different perspectives inscribed in the quasi infinite number of stories contribute to the ongoing discussion of the fictional universe. Genres unique to fanfiction such as *challenges* or *round robins* are specifically devoted to creating as many and diverse versions of one single event or moment as possible, each story proposing a new and divergent point of view or alternative take.[41] Frequently just offering little glimpses into the fictional universe of the meta-text, fanfiction stories moreover never stand on their own or exist in isolation from each other; they always need to be read in connection with the other stories of the fandom to create a full and multi-dimensional picture that can only form in the full dialogue among stories. As Francesca Coppa explains, "fan fiction is not

[41] *Challenges* exist in many different forms but are usually based on a prompt such as a single word the story needs to contain (cf. kicho14's "A few Obidala drabbles") or a more complex prescription (cf. daenabenjen42's "Failure in Orange and Pink"); fans then take said prompt to create a story based on its requirements, which is then posted in response to it to an archive like *FanFiction.Net* or, alternatively, posted on a specific date (such as *Secret Santa Challenges*), dedicated as a gift (*Charity Drive Challenges*) or need to fulfill specific length requirements (*Big Bangs* or *Mini Ficathons*), etc.

A *round robin* is usually initiated by one author who starts a story and then passes the (unfinished) text on to others who need to add to it, either to continue the plot or to write a different version of the first one. Cf., for example, the *Twilight* story "Happy Birthday, Boo!," the first chapter of which consists of short pieces by a number of writers, while the subsequent 27 chapters were written by one individual each (CBP2009).

merely a text, it's an event," since "there's a kind of simultaneity to the reception of fan fiction, a story everyone is reading, more or less at the same time, more or less together" ("Writing Bodies" 239). In a similar vein, fanauthor Ika notices how the dialogue between fan-texts aids her writing, enabling her to touch upon and access the multiple layers of negotiated perspectives a single story embodies:

> What I like about fanfiction is that you […] get that very highly trained audience that can understand very, very complex and allusive things [...] I love that I can write a couple of simple words [...] and they come already heavily pre-packaged with a whole host of connotations and associations and emotional resonances for the audience I'm writing for. (qtd. in Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 34)

Stories are thus inextricably connected, always interacting with each other not only in responses specifically directed at each other—such as a parody or a "companion to Onyx Moonbeam, Mad Server, NC Girl, Nana56, and Enkidu07's pieces" (IheartSam7)—but on each and every level due to the inherently referential nature of the genre. Just as the meta-text is just one possible rendering of events, every piece of fanfiction is another, with all of them in constant negotiation and exchange to create a fictional universe dominated by multiplicity and a fannish version of Bakhtin's "ultimate dialogicality" (*Problems* 18).

Dialogue, as above paragraphs illustrate, dominates on all levels of fanfiction writing, both confirming and transcending Bakhtinian notions of polyphony and heteroglossia in its creation of a fictional archive that explicitly understands itself as construed by the admittance and coexistence of multiple voices: Interaction takes place between fans within the fandom, between fans and producers, the meta-text and the fan-texts, and between the stories themselves. The whole genre, as Susan Ashley Wright writes, can be read as a "clear case of heteroglossic answering back" (119), with fanfiction therefore situating itself in a "dialogic relation to the canon, rather than in a hierarchically inferior position of poachers [sic] texts" (Isaksson).

It is this emphasis on the equality of all texts that has always been a driving force behind fanfiction writing, and the fact that both the author and the meta-text he/she produces are merely "one voice among many" and their "ideas […] wield no more weight than any other" (Wexelblat 217) needs to be acknowledged as another issue in which the genre transcends Bakhtinian thought. Besides the actualization of his metaphorical dialogue, fanfiction moreover does not adhere to the distinction between what Bakhtin called *authoritative* and *internally persuasive discourse* (*Dialogic Imagination* 342-55)

since in fanfiction's space of liberated writing and transformation only the latter can exist. As evidenced by their stories, fanauthors conceptualize the meta-text as internally persuasive discourse, which Bakhtin defines as creative and productive, continuously changing, and which can be "further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions" (345). Adhering to his characterization of internally persuasive discourse as text that is "*not finite*" but "*open*" and "able to reveal even newer *ways to mean*" (346), fanauthors make no room in their writing for his authoritative discourse, which has a "single meaning, […] demands our unconditional allegiance" and "permits no play" (343)—and which, conversely, is a status the producers of the meta-text would like to extend to their creations. Far from "celebrating the story the way it is" as, for instance, Lucasfilm's Jim Ward demands (qtd. in Harmon; Murray 11), fans enter into a dialogic relationship with the meta-text, transforming it by their contributions and expanding it in infinite and hitherto unthought ways. They base their stories on an "*open*" text that contains multiple "*ways to mean*" and reject the "assumption that utterances and their meanings are fixed, not modifiable as they come into contact with new voices" (Wertsch 226-27), discarding the notion of an authoritative discourse that demands absolute adherence and refuses intervention or change (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 343).

Despite the abovementioned shortcomings of Bakhtin's theory in connection to fanfiction, I nevertheless conclude that the fundamentally dialogic nature of the genre can be seen as engendering and supporting the fans' claim to agency. Although previous readings of fanfiction as dialogic such as Pimenova's and Christine Handley's[42] fail to acknowledge both the limits of the applicability of the concept to this new form of literature—and, in a more crucial point,—do not recognize the significance of fanfiction's inherent dialogicality beyond a purely textual and intra-fandom level as they omit its implications for fans' authority, I argue that dialogue lends itself well to explaining fannish power—on the one hand because it emphasizes participation of the many and on

[42] In addition, Susan Ashley Wright's 2009 dissertation "The Discourse of Fanfiction" makes ample use of Bakhtin's writings on heteroglossia, polyphony, and dialogic writing. Apart, however, from making a rather general statement about the dialogic nature of fanfiction, since "a story is always answering back to the canon text in addition to addressing the fan readers" (27), and pronouncing the genre to be highly heteroglossic, since "[f]an fiction writers appropriate texts and make them half their own even though they remain half someone else's" (80-81), she only applies Bakhtin's concepts to fandom-internal relations. Researching the fandoms of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Star Trek*, and *Thunderbird*, she discusses how heteroglossia—and its counterforce hegemony—can be shown to exist between individuals and groups of writers such as long-time fandom members/expert writers and new members/inexperienced writers (1-10; 173-74).

the other due to its intertextual aspect, i.e. its refusal to allow any participant to claim authority due to an alleged act of original creation.

Characterized by participation through and through, dialogue first confers agency to the voices that contribute to the conversation since *all* of them are "centrally involved" (Maybin 69) in the production of meaning: Dialogue is no monologue but instead consists of (at least) two active agents. In this form of communication, there is no author and no recipient, i.e. "the distinctions between speaker and listener, and [in extension] between writer and reader become blurred as the purposes and understandings of each are anticipated by, and interpenetrate, the other" (Maybin 69). As demonstrated in the above overview, this suspension of the binary between producers and consumers in favor of true exchange is "in action" (Pimenova 55) on the various levels of fanfiction, with the figure of the fanauthor as an amalgamation of writer/reader as its most prominent embodiment. Significantly, dialogue deconstructs any notion of a single authorial voice, substituting it by multiplicity and the delegation of authority to all participants of the conversation. Re-interpreting the Bakhtinian concept of the dialogic in reference to fanfiction suggests a model in which interaction accounts for fannish claims to agency and power due to the communicative link it establishes between the authors of the meta-text and the fanauthors. Dialogic participation necessitates a blurring of roles and functions so that the productive power of the dialogue gives equal share to the parties involved and therefore fuels fannish aspirations to leave behind the status of a passive 'receiving' audience to become instead an active influence on the producers and the meta-text. Consequentially, theorizing the genre as dialogic provides for a possible approach to the claims to authority fans voice in their stories and paratexts, since focusing on the participatory aspect of Bakhtin's concept "not only deconstructs the hierarchy between producer and consumer […] (in which active readers, still marginalized, may only produce their interpretations illicitly), but also provides a space in which the conversation continues" (Handley 101). In this way, dialogue also proves to be a central means of transferring fannish participation from the meta-text and fan-text to the realm of actual production; as my study of *Supernatural* illustrates, the show's fans and producers engage in a multi-dimensional dialogue that extends over personal meetings and the fanauthors' transformative works to represent fans in the meta-text and give them a greater share in the process of production. Ultimately, as this dissertation thus ascertains in a deliberate reframing of previous research on the genre's dialogic nature, fanfiction needs to be acknowledged "not as poaching, but as part

of a dialogue between fans and the creative side" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 7), with each party a full-fledged participant in their own right.

Secondly, applying a Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue to fanfiction emphasizes the genre's intertextual aspect and so denies the authors of the meta-text claims to ownership and originality to instead ensure fannish re-usage and transformation. A "word," as Bakhtin first postulates, "does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language […] but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's context, serving other people's intentions" (*Dialogic Imagination* 294); it exists only in the "'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it" and thus becomes a "living utterance [that] cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads" (*Dialogic Imagination* 276). Read in combination with his evocative statement that the "speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (*Speech Genres* 93), Bakhtin thus advances two important features of later theories of intertextuality that are inherently significant in fanfiction—namely a negation of the producers' creationist powers and an assertion of the fans' transformative influence on the meta-text through their stories.

Although Bakhtin's writings do not found intertextuality per se, since he rather focuses on synchronic or lateral dialogue between utterances in a single novel—and thus may somewhat resemble the "intra-textuality" (Booth 57) of fanfiction that also does not sharply distinguish between individual texts—,[43] his ideas nevertheless function as an important precursor to Kristeva's and other scholars' diachronic or vertical notion of intertextuality that occurs between different texts from different times. No matter, however, if one adheres to a Bakhtinian view of intertextuality or a structuralist or a poststructuralist view,[44] fanfiction certainly needs to be described as an intertextual genre

[43] Even Jenkins revisits Bakhtin's early idea of intertextuality when he describes that "Bakhtin rejects notions of original authorship in favor of a conception of the writer as always already confronting a history of previous authorship," referring to Bakhtin's wording in *The Dialogic Imagination* upon explaining that "writers, just as readers, are poachers since their words come not out of a dictionary but out of 'other people's mouths'" (*Textual Poachers* 224).

[44] In the years since Kristeva first formulated a comprehensive theory of intertextuality with her 1966 essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," numerous interpretations of intertextuality have emerged, with the main differences occurring in questions of (1) the text(s) that serve(s) as the 'source' for the intertextual references, i.e. a *texte général* or texts following certain criteria such as 'poetic' or 'literary' texts, (2) whether intertextuality is a general characteristic of any text (i.e. an ontological or inherent quality) or a specific characteristic of specific texts (i.e. can be studied and classified according to descriptive approaches), and, very importantly, (3) whether intertextuality is dependent on authorial intention and/or the

due to the "initial impetus" (Pimenova 49) the meta-text provides and the traces it thus leaves in the stories, not to mention the omnipresent dialogic interrelatedness of all the texts.[45] Frequently, fans confirm the inherent connection of the texts in the genre, liberally acknowledging that "all [stories] relate back to [the meta-text] in one way or another" (idealskeptic) and that "a lot of [the fictional universe with all its text] is reflected in this story" (MsEstora).

Discussing fanfiction from the perspective of intertextuality, however, first necessitates explicitly pointing out that the genre does not adhere to a concept of vertical intertextuality that creates a clear dichotomy between pre-text and text. As mentioned before, it would be much too simplistic to describe the meta-text as a singular 'source' that fuels all the stories: Instead of working with the canon, i.e. the fixed meta-text, fans replace it by the *fanon*, i.e. the wide fan-created fictional universe that is, as Lea, a member of the administration team of the popular website *Supernatural Wiki* describes in an interview, "fluid and constantly in movement," that "is collective knowledge" since "fandom is like a collective mind—a beehive, so to speak. There's just no queen bee." Emphasizing the absence of a "queen bee," i.e. a dominant authority such as the meta-text or its producers, Lea's statement illustrates profoundly how collective and continuously changing fan production thus substitutes a clearly definable pre-text, with fanauthors denying the meta-text the status of a 'source' by taking their "inspiration from a conversation" (Sora Sotara) with other fans, "yet another wonderful piece of [fan] art" (Rednikjow), or simply any kind of fannish writing. Dissolving the meta-text into the fluid

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readers' awareness and recognition of intertextual references (cf., for example, Pfister, "Konzepte"; Pfister, "How"; Hebel 17-36; Allen; Friedman; Broich; Orr).

Scholars such as Kristeva herself, Barthes, Harold Bloom, Michael Riffaterre, or Gerard Genette each approached these questions in divergent ways, resulting in conflicting interpretations of the theory of intertextuality, which have in turn led to the construction of mediating models that seek to reconcile the more global poststructuralist and the more concise structuralist/hermeneutic theories since both are not mutually exclusive (Pfister, "Konzepte" 25). Udo J. Hebel's study of the intertextual references in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, for instance, provides a large scale inquiry into deliberate, intended, and marked references to the universal intertext of history and culture (29), thus devising an applicable and fruitful way to deal with the divergent theoretic approaches.

[45] Although fanfiction could certainly be classified as intertextual according to both post- and structuralist approaches, I would like to specifically point towards a mediating model Pfister suggests to catalog texts according to their intertextual intensity ("Konzepte" 25-30). Analyzing fanfiction and its relation to the meta-text according to his six criteria of referentiality, communicativity, self-reflexivity, structurality, selectivity, and dialogicality (my translation) situates the genre as highly intertextual, in particular with regard to the constant awareness of the fans of the intertextual references within fandom and the fanauthors' deliberate use of the meta-text ('communicativity').

fanon thus rejects notions of vertical intertextuality since fan production is—in the best sense of Bakhtin's writings—a "*living* utterance" that "brush[es] up against thousands of living dialogic threads" (*Dialogic Imagination* 276; my emphasis), never to stand still and acquire a status quo.[46]

A second important feature of fanfiction that contradicts approaching the genre from the point of view of vertical intertextuality is the constant transformation the meta-text experiences through the fanon. By undergoing thousands and millions of "remake[s] (Beautifiedgirl) and "[r]eworking[s]" (AnGelFacE S2), it cannot escape the effects the stories exert on it: In contrast to previous ideas about the one-way structure of intertextuality, the impact fannish writing has on the meta-text is a prime example of the *dialogic* structure of meaning-production via intertextual references.[47] First, the meta-text is transformed since fans' activities influence their own conception of the meta-text and their perspectives on the elements narrated, leading to a marked difference in the construction of characters or other issues. Fanon, for instance, has it that *Supernatural*'s protagonist "Dean was much smarter than the show sometimes portrays" (adder574; also cf. K Hanna Korossy; sparkycola1; winchestiel), which in turn impacts how fans view the meta-text.[48] Furthermore, their stories have also more far-reaching consequences in that they visibly alter the meta-text for anyone inside and outside of fandom to see: The inclusion of fans, fanfiction, and fannish activities in *Supernatural*, for example, depends on the active participation of fans, whose activities thus make use of the meta-text and its representations in the fanon and, in a reversal of direction, directly and overtly influence the meta-text. As such, the text of the show and its fandom constitutes a multidimensional

[46] Moreover, the fanon in its specific make-up as an archive of multiple texts that form a collective view on the meta-text's fictional universe thus also rejects other scholars' constructions of the pre-text: In its restriction to one specific fandom it is, for instance, fundamentally different from the universal intertext Hebel's mediating model employs (29), whereas the fannish emphasis on the collective archive objects to Michael Riffaterre's conception of the intertext as a "corpus of [individual] texts the reader may legitimately connect with the one before his eyes" (626).

[47] Hebel, for instance, calls this the "Dialogizität des Aktualisierungsprozesses" (51) and emphasizes that no text remains unchanged by referring to and being referred to by other texts.

[48] Scholars have also suggested employing the mathematical concept of Brownian Motion, which describes the movement and collisions of particles in space, to better visualize the changes individual stories can exert on the meta-text: "It's not," as Parrish writes, "the ineffective bumping of those little particles [the fan-texts] that matters. Rather, it is the motion overall, a process that can be used at the micro level to make things happen on a macro level [i.e. to transform the meta-text]. It is the motion, and not the molecules, that counts" ("Metaphors"; also cf. de Certeau 40; Penley, "Brownian Motion"). To express it more concisely, small changes in the fictional universe of the meta-text via the addition of few stories can over time affect big changes in the whole fictional universe when fans spread the new elements to more and more stories, which then finally impact the fanon and the meta-text.

intertextual web that defies simplistic notions of pre-text and 'receiving text.' As Jules Wilkinson emphasizes in a statement on the circular nature of fannish intertextuality, fans and fannish practices "have already changed the source text. […] As the source text incorporates and comments on both itself and its fandom, it remains to be seen how […] seeing what we do reflected back to us, will change how we play at being fans."

As such, the fanauthors' collectively produced fanon accordingly suggests that a more synchronic or lateral conception of intertextuality similar to which Bakhtin conceived of in his writings may actually offer a more fruitful approach to fanfiction, although, of course, his theories cannot be transferred verbatim. A heteroglossic novel with an author to engender its multiplicity is still structurally widely dissimilar from the fannish fictional universe, which is constructed by a multiplicity of texts independent of an overarching authorial entity. Nevertheless, what makes Bakhtin's initial thoughts about intertextuality so compelling is his emphasis on the "living utterance" that does not have an identifiable origin and cannot be owned by any one person or instance (*Dialogic Imagination* 276-78, 293-94). Fannish practices, as I have illustrated, provide ample evidence of the fans' conception of both the meta-text and their own texts as "living utterance[s]" that freely move between fanauthors, their audiences, and any members of their communities. In this way of thinking, the producers of the meta-text—just like the fans themselves—are neither 'author-gods' nor 'biblical Adams' who can lay claim to a 'virginal work of creation' (cf. Barthes, *Image* 146; Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 93).

The indeterminacy of intertextuality in regards to origin, ownership, and originality thus presents a possibility for the fanauthors to constitute themselves as equal participants in the free circulation and transformation of texts. In an intertextual web, multiplicity replaces singularity, with no contributor to the fictional universe able to distinguish him-/herself as a proprietor of words and texts he/she created in a supposedly empty space. As texts engage in intertextual and dialogic relations with a "multitude of routes, roads and paths" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 278), ownership can no longer be based on originality but needs to be substantially reinterpreted: In their paratexts, fans prove how it is their emotional attachment to the meta-texts that makes them write fanfiction since they "love 'em" (Liz Roman), i.e. they substitute the factor of originality by their self-identification as a fan. Writing is no longer dependent on having 'invented' the meta-text but becomes an activity that adds another "living utterance" to the "thousands of living dialogic threads" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 276). Clearly evidenced by the millions

of stories online, fans make use of the belief that "once [texts] are put into circulation, others can seize that text [and use it] as a means to empowerment" (Jones, "Being"). They engage with the meta-text, retell and rework it—turn it into something different that is only a small part of the infinite fictional universe; they draw power from their activities and the reverse impact they have on the producers of the meta-text and the meta-text itself; they participate in producing text and meta-text. "The fun part about fanfiction," writes paperbkryter in an assertion of the significance fandom places on intertextual thought and the multi-dimensionality it entails, "is the freedom. Why would anyone want to write for the show itself when you're pretty much locked onto one course of direction?"

Dialogic intertextuality, as I term this construct of Bakhtinian and subsequent thinking, thus becomes a driving principle behind fannish claims to agency and authority by its deconstruction of the main arguments the producers of the meta-text employ. Originality and ownership lose the seemingly indissoluble link they established in their attempts to keep the upper hand in the struggle between themselves and the fans, denying power to anyone who did not conceive the characters, plots, or settings of the meta-text. Making use of Bakhtin's truism that a "speaker"—or writer—"is not the biblical Adam" (*Speech Genres* 93), fans conceptualize themselves as being on an equal footing with the producers, investing themselves with the agency to first take any elements and then "put them back […] in better condition" (mytruealias). In a connection this thesis offers for the first time in fan studies, fannish agency can therefore derive from applying Bakhtinian dialogicality and intertextuality to fanfiction—in particular due to the genre's transgression of these two theories by dissolving the entities they tend to uphold: Power thus mainly stems from the limits of dialogic intertextuality. First, Bakhtin's single authorial entity that creates a metaphorical dialogue is dissolved into a plurality of voices within the fannish community who engage in an actual and powerful dialogue, thus delegating the singular authority of the producers to the multiplicity of fans to advance the ongoing democratization of the media landscape in a "dialogic process" (Coombe 131, also cf. Jenkins, Ford, and Green 35-37). Secondly, the pretext is dissolved into a wide and inherently fluid fictional universe, in which the fanon deconstructs meta-textual authority and assumes its powerful status; in short, intertextual dependence is replaced by the fannish archive.

2.3 Repositioning Fanfiction: The Genre as a Democratic Archive

Googling the terms *fanfiction* and *archive* results in more than five million hits, listing, for instance, all-fandom archives such as *FanFiction.Net* or the *Archive of Our Own*, archives devoted to specific fandoms such as the *Twilight Archives* or *The Force.Net's Fanfiction Archive*, and archives devoted to specific subgenres or pairings of fanfiction such as the *Kirk/Spock Fanfiction: Automated Archive*, the *Sam/Dean Slash Archive*, or the *Lois & Clark Fanfic Archive*. Advertising themselves by slogans such as the "World's largest fanfiction archive and forum where fanfic writers and readers around the globe gather to share their passion," "a completely free space to read, write, and share," or "fan-written stories appear in this archive that includes every genre and theme," these sites[49] express the most fundamental drive of an archive both Jacques Derrida in his 1995 work *Archive Fever* and Abigail Derecho in her 2006 reappraisal of his theory in regard to fanfiction as "Archontic Literature" establish: Namely, that "the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (Derrida 68), i.e. that "any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents" (Derecho 64).

The expansionist drive of fanfiction can hardly be described any better than what these two scholars write in reference to the archive.[50] The "archontic principle," as Derecho states in her discussion of Derrida's term, "is that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself. The archontic principle never allows the archive to remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stores" (64).

[49] These slogans quoted from *FanFiction.Net*, the *Twilight Archives*, and the *Lois & Clark Fanfic Archive* (in this order) to illustrate their "archontic principle" (Derecho 64) appear in Google's hit list but are not necessarily stated (in the same form) on the websites themselves.

[50] Besides Derrida, a number of other scholars have advanced theories of the archive, with Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* probably the most prominent and influential. Since Derecho, however, who was the first to apply the concept of the archive to fanfiction, refers explicitly—and only—to Derrida, I do not delve into the vastly divergent constructions of the archive as this would far exceed the purposes of this dissertation. On a history of the different perceptions and usages of the archive, cf., for example, Marlene Manoff's 2004 overview "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines."

Moreover, I do not discuss Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome put forward as an approach to research and scholarship in their *A Thousand Plateaus* of 1980. Although some aspects are related to the archive, such as their idea that a "rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" and thus presents a counter model to the (story) "tree" they propose to be "filiation" instead of the rhizome's "alliance" (27), my research has found their concept to not be as applicable to fanfiction as the democratic archive, which is more suited to account for the fanauthors' claims to participation and agency: While the structure of the fannish stories may well accord to Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that "the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and…and…and…'" (27), the rhizome is ultimately confined to the fictional universe itself without providing for the fannish reconstruction of power structures in the larger context of the media industry.

"[A]dded and expanded scenes" (Maya Perez), "a couple more chapters" (tinesy 05) and the recognition that every story contributes to the "amazing amount of brilliant stories out there" (Samantha V) have always been the cornerstones of fanfiction writing. Fanauthors are "well aware of the fact that there is probably going to be *many* different stories based around this single quote alone, let alone the whole episode" but that does not stop them from adding one more "version of how the conversation went" (enigma-kar) to the archive of the meta-text. In fanfiction, each story is valued as contributing to the fandom's fictional universe—no story is 'too much,' since any addition reifies the fannish belief in the open quality of texts. No matter how "*many* different stories" a "quote" or a single "episode" have spawned, fans still appreciate every text for the new facets it bringts to the text and fans do "not [get] tired of reading about the same two people falling in love in 5000 different ways" (sleepingalone); the very fact that a story exists, i.e. that it contributes to the fanon and that it is shared with others in the community, is what counts. The "acknowledgement that every text contains infinite potentialities, any of which could be actualized by any writer interested in doing the job" (Derecho 76) thus presents the foundation for theorizing the genre as archontic—and, accordingly, as fundamentally democratic since it is its very nature as an archive that has fanfiction "philosophically opposed to hierarchy, property and the dominance of one variant of a series over another variant" (Derecho 77).

In express opposition to labeling fanfiction *derivative* or *appropriative* (64),[51] both of which imply said notions of "hierarchy, property and […] dominance," Derecho therefore suggests classifying the genre as

> "archontic" literature because the word *archontic* is not laden with references to property rights or judgments about the relative merits of the antecedent and descendant works. A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. Archontic texts are not delimited properties with definite borders that can be transgressed. So all texts that build on a previously existing text are not lesser than the source text, and they do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text's archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it. An archontic text allows, or even invites, writers to enter it, select

[51] Moreover, Derecho also draws a boundary between archontic literature and the concept of intertextuality. Although she acknowledges that "in a sense, all texts can be called 'archontic'" due to their inherent openness and their "potential for infinite expansion," she restricts the label of *archontic literature* to "those works that generate variations that explicitly announce themselves as variations" (65), and among those she gives specific prominence to fanfiction stories as these "tie themselves overtly to preexisting texts" (66).

> specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive. (64-65)

Building on Derrida, who defined the archontic principle as a "principle of […] gathering together" (3), Derecho thus establishes a particularly useful theory of fanfiction as the concept of the archive accounts for numerous of its most fundamental characteristics—characteristics that were certainly enchanced and accentuated by fans' relocating to the Internet so as affirm Derecho's theory: The ever increasing number of millions of stories online are ample evidence of the "tendency toward enlargement and accretion" she detects,[52] and the very activities of the fanauthors demonstrate the process of writers entering a text's archive, creating new artifacts, and depositing their work back into the archive to expand it further (65). Constructing the fictional universe as an archive, she moreover addresses what I define to be part of the democratic aspect of the genre, i.e. its emphasis on the importance and equal status of all texts, since she underlines that fanauthors "do not violate" the text but "only add" to it. Emphasizing fanfiction's participatory nature that has fans aspire to a greater share in the meta-text, she provides a powerful counterstatement to claims of hegemony and exclusion made by the producers. Instead of attributing singular weight to an 'original' text, archontic literature ultimately assumes its power through its accumulation of texts that are "not lesser than the source" (65). The more texts enter the archive, the more authoritative it becomes in accordance with Derrida's explanation that, "[b]y incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*" (68). Part of an archive of equally important texts, the meta-text therefore loses its allegedly unique significance and becomes just another voice in the expansive fictional universe and *contributes* to its accretion of "*auctoritas*" instead of *being* its "*auctoritas*." As such, the enormity of the archive trumps the often-claimed exceptionalism of the meta-text: Giving weight and authority to the collective fan-texts that supersede the increasingly negligible power of a single voice, this process "enable[s] us to rid ourselves of notions of hierarchy" (Derecho 73) that otherwise would privilege the meta-text.

[52] To provide a brief statistical underpinning to this claim of immense expansion, I point to the increase in the number of stories posted on *FanFiction.Net* alone: It rose from 162,111 in 2001 to more than 6.6 million in 2011, with the average growth rate since 2007 close to a million stories a year (which suggests a current number of stories of about ten to eleven million, although reliable data are currently not available). For further information, cf. the expansive statistics on *FanFiction.Net* collected by Alixe that cover the site's authors, individual fandoms, etc.

The conceptualization of fanfiction as an "*in-finite*" archive that "sweeps away the logic of finitude and the simple factual limits, […] the spatio-temporal conditions of conservation" (Derrida 19), thus facilitates an understanding of the genre as based on what Jenkins called "[a]dditive comprehension" in reference to transmedia storytelling, i.e. the "expansion of interpretive possibility that occurs when fictional franchises are extended across multiple texts and media" (*Convergence Culture* 319, 127-34). The term puts a name to the fannish truism that reading the meta-text on its own cannot lead to understanding its fictional universe since this can only result from reading the complex fannish archive extended across not only "multiple" but virtually countless texts—or, rather, to make a concession to the archive's literal infinity, can only result from acquiring detailed understanding of the fanon.[53] Each text, as fans know, contributes to designing and redesigning the fictional universe because "each layering on of the story […] both adds to and alters the whole, forcing the participant to reassess the story" (Ross 206). It is never enough to just know the meta-text or one or two stories or conversations but fans need to keep on reading, staying abreast of the changes that occur in the fandom through its constant enlargement in order to acquire "additive comprehension"—i.e. understanding that builds on the multiplicity and mutability of the archive. Underlining the inherent fluidity of the archive with its principle of continuous expansion, Derecho's theory of fanfiction as archontic literature thus underscored for the first time "the importance of reading individual fanfics as part of a larger whole, as part of an archive that both extends and enlarges the original source" (Parrish, "Back" 178; also cf. Leavenworth and Isaksson 68-111).

By their continuous production of stories—by creating "What if" (reddog24485) texts that respond to the meta text or other stories, by posting an "experiment of mine" (shaperlord67)—, the fanauthors therefore engage in the process of constructing an archive that "never stabilize[s] into one definable text" (Derecho 75): Fanfiction in its very definition has never been about "celebrating the story the way it is," as Lucasfilm so

[53] Certainly, it needs to be acknowledged here that, especially in large fandoms, no fan has read every single piece of fanfiction or even the large majority of stories. Nevertheless, most fans read "a whole lot of fan-fiction," even to the point of not being able to "keep straight what was in the real book […] and what I had read online" (the purple chai), which allows them to acquire a detailed understanding of the fanon via "additive comprehension," to be aware of the changes in the fanon, and, as the purple chai so succinctly confirms here, to eliminate hierarchies between fanfiction and the meta-text. Moreover, following fannish discussions on sites such as *LiveJournal* or *Tumblr* gives fanauthors a relatively comprehensive overview of trends and developments within fandom and other people's fanfiction writings and readings.

infamously demanded (cf. Harmon; Murray 11), but seeks to invest the story's audience with the power to participate, alter, and transform it. "To write or read or study fanfic," Derecho concludes, "is to admit that the text is never stable" (75), that it is "never solidified, calcified, or at rest, but is in continuous play, its characters, stories, and meanings all varying through the various fics written about it" (77). It becomes, in Jonathan Gray's words, a "postmodern subject" as there "is no such thing as a text that simply *is*" ("When Is" 94).

An inherent characteristic of the fannish archive, this instability and fluidity can be read as an expression of Derrida's notion of "archive fever," which he defines as a complex intertwining of a "conservation drive" and a quasi-Freudian "destruction drive" (19): In the very process of collecting new materials, he finds, the "archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself" (12). According to this interpretation, an archive is situated in the apex of these binaries; it operates on a desire to add and preserve which is simultaneously constantly undermined by the shifts in the structure and shape of the archive the contribution of new texts generates. Although this aspect of Derrida's concept remains noticeably absent in Derecho's theory, his characterization of the inner workings of an archive can be easily applied to explaining the simultaneous collective and fluid nature of fannish archives. Never substituting—or even removing—a former story by a new one ("conversation"), fanauthors seek to enlarge the archive of the meta-text by their contributions; any new story, however, results in an irrevocable alteration of the fictional universe, which may even lead to a change in the fanon ("destruction").[54] In terms of the fans' agency, I argue, it is exactly this dichotomy that has fanfiction gain its independence from the producers, since it is the fanauthors' own creations that engage in both conserving and destroying the fictional universe of the meta-text at their will. Through their stories, fans empower themselves to alter what the original producers think of as 'fixed' and 'closed'—the meta-text in "the way it is" (Harmon; Murray 11)—, allowing

[54] Applying the Derridean drives to fandom's online presence, fanauthor Versaphile published an essay on the importance of the fannish archives, i.e. the websites that store fanfiction, in the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, in which she discusses their conservatory and destructive aspects. She argues that "there is nothing so vital to […] fandom's survival as the archive" since "losing our stories may indeed mean losing parts of our history." In a "brief overview of the main online interfaces fans have used to share their works," Versaphile elaborates on the advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of fannish story archiving, emphasizing the dangers of the disappearance of archives which "devastate[s] a fandom by taking years of history with it in one fell swoop." Elemental needs of fandom, she claims in consequence, are both "strong central archives" and "a culture that recognizes the worth of archiving," since "to archive a story is to contribute it to the memory of fandom."

them to not only amass different interpretations and versions of the text the producers distributed for passive consumption but simultaneously to destruct and reconstruct the whole archive according to their "purposes, and preference" (Shannz)—"how [they] want it" (alwaysxsaidsnape).

In light of the significance this dissertation attributes to the destruction drive as *the* expression of fannish agency, it remains curious to note that Pimenova explicitly denies its presence in her research, pointing out how "there is no such destruction in fan fiction," since the genre "never tries to destroy the canon" (51). Although she mentions that not "every fan fiction archive remains absolutely intact and grows without deterioration" (51), she only uses this qualification in reference to lost and forgotten texts in online archives, similar to what Versaphile points out in her abovementioned essay. As such, Pimenova does not acknowledge the inherent fluidity of the archive and the very real destruction of the meta-text/canon its transformative stories and the fanon commit. This negligence of the continuously occurring destruction and reconstruction by the fanauthors also leads Pimenova to conclude that fanfiction essentially remains a derivative genre, complete with a "still-remaining hierarchy of origin" (51)—a notion which the very idea of fanfiction as an archive, i.e. a "very attractive" model that "validates" (51) the genre as Pimenova herself confirms, thoroughly undermines. The "*in-finite*" archive cannot be subject to the "simple factual limits" (Derrida 19) of derivation.

Notwithstanding Pimenova's objections, the archontic nature of fanfiction with its interplay of conservation and destruction can be witnessed in millions and thousands of stories online, which bespeak both drives in, first, the sheer number of texts, and secondly, the complexity and mutability of the fanon they generate. In respect to how fanfiction portrays itself, theorizing it as an archive "*better* describes what fanfic is and how it operates as literature" (Derecho 63; my emphasis): In comparison with other models, it allows for a "better" account of the power and agency of the fanfiction authors, their emphasis on the equality and non-hierarchical structure of texts, and the grassroots democratic tendencies of participation, representation, and influence of the many. Supported by the intrinsic indeterminacy of the archive, of which Derrida says that one can "only have an impression, an insistent impression through the unstable feeling of a shifting figure" (29), the very nature of fanfiction as archontic literature disclaims the conventional status and power of the meta-text. Subjected to the archive's fluidity and the constant transformations of its "destruction drive," it cannot function as a fixed, closed,

"solidified" or "calcified" (Derecho 77) source and thus needs to abstain from making any claims to authority and a more privileged hierarchical position. Part of the archive, it changes like any other text that is stored there—it is but a fraction of the "*auctoritas*" the whole archive commands—and just a detail in the "participatory process of constructing the story" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 83; Lucy Gillam, "Gather").

Reading fanfiction as archontic literature consequentially helps to understand the democratic tendencies at work within the genre, since its emphasis on the equal value of texts together with fannish representation and participation positions the fanauthors as co-creators whose contributions to the archive are vital in its drive for expansion. Experiencing the effects of their creative efforts by the increasing size and "*auctoritas*" of the archive, fans are easily driven to claiming authority or agency and exerting power in their relationship to the producers, intending to transfer their influence on the text to another realm and level, namely the production process of the meta-text itself. The "democratic genre," as Sheenagh Pugh calls fanfiction, has its origin in the democratic principles of archontic literature that "undermines conventional notions of authority, boundaries, and property" (Derecho 72).

Participation and the destruction of hierarchies dominate fanfiction to such a degree that Derecho, this time rightly, omits another central instance of Derrida's conception of the archive, which becomes significant in my subsequent repositioning of the genre as a democratic archive: In her reappraisal of his theory, she never mentions the "*archons*" as "those who commanded" (Derrida 2), and so rejects the influence of the producers. For Derrida, *archons* represent authorities with a wide range of powers whose existence both institutionalizes the archive and ensures its correct interpretation, marking them as superior to the texts and—by implication—to those who entrusted the texts to the archive: "The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. […] They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law" (2). Although—as will be discussed later—fanfiction has some internal "guardians" such as website administrators, the genre, to make Derecho's tacit omission of Derrida's statements explicit, does not need—or even know— such *external* "guardians"; or, to be more precise, fanauthors have eliminated any authorities who see themselves in that position and adhere to the belief that they are the founders and keepers of the archive with the sole "power to interpret" it. Instead, the fannish archive exists independently of an

overarching authorial instance such as the producers, critics, or other institutions because it is the fanauthors themselves who guard and interpret the texts they contribute. With the act of writing fanfiction about it, the meta-text passes into their ownership and care; they assume control and take over the process of meaning-making devoid of an external, i.e. non-fandom, "guardian" or "law." Collectively creating more texts to enlarge and irrevocably alter the archive, fans substitute the producers of the meta-text by becoming their own archons. In this process, they invest the manifold participating voices with the authority Derrida reserved for a single entity and thus ensure a redistribution of power to the multiplicity of the fanauthors—in particular, since in fandom even website hosts or administrators are fans themselves. Independent from outside influences with "hermeneutic right and competence," the community of fanauthors thus functions as both archivist and archon, gathering, guarding, and interpreting the texts in the archive on its own.

For all practical purposes, this double function of the fannish community can be well observed, for instance, in the establishment of the *Archive of Our Own* by the Organization for Transformative Works, which is "a nonprofit organization run by and for fans to provide access to and preserve the history of fanworks and fan cultures" (*Organization for Transformative Works*). The *Archive* collects fanfiction from every fandom to conserve it for the future and protect it from the inevitable changes occurring in the online world (cf. *Archive of Our Own*; Lothian; Versaphile), with the goal to keep both the stories and their storage space within fandom and under community control. Its explicit emphasis on being "fan-created" and "fan-run" together with its mission statement clearly signifies its dual role of archivist and archon, i.e. its proclaimed aim to serve as a space that collects, preserves, and guards fandom and its works:

> We are proactive and innovative in protecting and defending our work from commercial exploitation and legal challenge. We preserve our fannish economy, values, and creative expression by protecting and nurturing our fellow fans, our work, our commentary, our history, and our identity while providing the broadest possible access to fannish activity for all fans. (*Archive of Our Own*)

The *Archive of Our Own* thus fulfills Versaphile's demand for a "culture that recognizes the worth of archiving" and denies fandom-external forces control over fandom-internal processes and interactions. It shields fanfiction's stories from any

possibility for a non-fannish archon to intervene,[55] demonstrating the fannish independence from the Derridean concept of a powerful authorial entity with no inherent connection to the texts they are meant to guard and interpret in lieu of the community the texts originate from. Fandom does it on "*Our Own*," with all of its authors engaging in both the tasks of conserving and guarding its stories.[56]

The example of the *Archive of Our Own* demonstrates in a powerful way how hierarchical structures as Derrida's archive still shows to retain have little or no place in fanfiction. Opposing "outdated notions of hierarchy and property" (61), Derecho's re-interpretation of his writings thus presents a more useful theoretical concept despite her negligence of mentioning or elaborating on his "destruction drive." In addition to the participatory effort and the equal status of all texts she emphasizes, the changes the preserved stories evoke in the archive, however, are just as essential to fanfiction as the former since the agency of the fanauthors rests on the *two* aspects of "archive fever." As

[55] The fact that the *Archive of Our Own* is "fan-run" becomes even more significant when one considers the "actual logistics" of websites that Versaphile, for instance, warns for: Their hosts or administrators, she writes, "can impose control over what is permitted and what is deleted," which for fans could "become very problematic indeed when archivists become curators, choosing to enforce quality and value judgments."

Although far from the extent of exerting influence Versaphile fears, her concerns can be judged valid if one takes into account, for example, the various changes in its terms of service *FanFiction.Net* has undergone over the years, which resulted in the removal of stories that were regarded as too sexually explicit or violated other guidelines. By and large, however, the texts that disappeared from the site were re-uploaded to different spaces such as *LiveJournal*, which shows how *FanFiction.Net*'s "actual logistics" have not managed to substantially alter the fictional archive of the meta-text. Even though the value of online archives to the community cannot be underestimated, this case nevertheless illustrates how the websites merely function as vehicles that visualize fanfiction's archontic nature.

[56] Instead of recognizing the whole community as fanfiction's archons, some scholars discuss alleged fandom-internal hierarchies that yield "discursive power" to so-called *BNF*s, i.e. Big Name Fans (Hills, "Not Just" 104; also cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 30-35; Rebaza 95; Wexelblat 217). Although one might argue that these *BNF*s—fanauthors who may be widely read, host popular websites, or have personal connections to the producers—function as personalized archons, I reject such a notion because of the very limited range of influence *BNF*s have, if any at all: Due to the huge number of community members, one *BNF*—even if he/she may host an influential site or be a prolific writer—can never reach a substantial portion of the fandom and subject them to his/her opinion. Also, websites such as *FanFiction.Net* or the *Archive of Our Own* work on the self-add principle, i.e. within the frame of the respective guidelines each fan can upload whatever story they want without any controlling instance that may 'guard' what the archive looks like and which transformations of the meta-text may be accepted or not.

Jenkins, Ford, and Green employ a similar concept to the *BNF* when they write about "grassroots intermediaries" who they imagine to be the "strongest supporters" of brands and companies that "help spread the word [about the various products to be sold] through the various networks to which they belong." They argue that "[b]ecause these grassroots intermediaries are trusted by other community members, because their voices are widely heard, and because they also have access to empowered decision-makers, they become the locus for [advertising] campaigns" (299).

demonstrated above, the fannish archive is therefore neither fully Derridean nor Derechian: On the one hand it is free of external archons that reserve for themselves the prerogative of interpretation and enforce hierarchies of texts and institutions; on the other hand, it is characterized by a "destruction drive" that ensures its mutability as a cornerstone of fannish power. In view of these shortcomings of Derrida's and Derecho's approaches to the (fannish) archive, I accordingly argue that only a reworking of both theories that retains their advantages and reappraises their basic assumptions and limitations can adequately represent fanfiction's democratic nature—its active participatory intervention in texts and their production that ensures the equal status of fans and producers, fan-texts and meta-text, and enables fanauthors, at least in some cases, to have an impact on the actual production process of the meta-texts to enact changes on the media industry.

Fanfiction, I argue accordingly, needs to be repositioned as a *democratic archive*, conceptualizing the genre's archontic nature to emphasize the redistribution of power between fans and producers. Consciously employing a political term, my reappraisal of the archive as discussed in regard to Derrida's and Derecho's writings stresses that the model of fanfiction as an archive does not have to remain restricted to describing the genre's structural qualities as Derecho implies (61; also cf. Pimenova 47-52) but transcends the limitations she thus imposes in order to become a means of exerting influence on previously hegemonial forces and creating new spheres of influence outside of previous boundaries. For this purpose, the theory of the archontic offers a helpful framework since it foregrounds the genre's non-hierarchical structure, its expansionist drive, and its belief in and claims to participation on all levels to suggest a redistribution of power and agency starting from the grassroots level of the fans. Although neither Derrida nor Derecho exploit the (fannish) archive's full potential in terms of its implications for the authority of its contributors, "[a]rchives and archiving," as Alexis Lothian contends, "are always already political" and therefore assume a role beyond mere storage and preservation; in the context of fanfiction, they consequently become a means of transforming the traditional binaries between fans and producers: Eliminating the presence of the archon, they enable the creation of a collective fannish fictional universe in a performance of ultimate participation based on expansion, equality, and representation. Accomplished by the efforts of the fanauthors, it is the fluidity of the fanon—its ability to undergo a substantial metamorphosis whenever a new story enters the

archive—that has Kristina Busse and Susie Lute confirm the political outreach of fanfiction; they term it the community's "group act of civil disobedience."

Archives, as the notion of the *democratic* archive emphasizes in hitherto unrecognized intensity, therefore assume a powerful function in shifting the point of view from the meta-text and its producers to the participatory practices of fanfiction writing, which are ultimately instrumental in transforming the media landscape per se. After all, as Derrida acknowledges, "[t]here is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (4). Conceptualizing fanfiction as an archon-less, non-hierarchical, expansive, and fluid fannish archive yields authority to fandom on all the levels Derrida defines as important; it provides the means for fanauthors to exert influence and power on the meta-text, which is reconstituted as part of the archive and gets dissolved in its multiple voices. As such, fannish agency in regard to their own archive prepares the grounds for more far-reaching intervention and participation in the production process of their objects of fandom, leading to a more "[e]ffective democratization" of the media landscape and entertainment industry. Those in control of the archive have authority—they will not agree to restrictions imposed on them by the producers of the meta-text, which to them after all is just one more text in their sphere of influence.

Fannish practices of expansion and contribution based on the archontic nature of their fanfiction have thus led to a "moment of transition, one in which an old system [of strictly upheld binaries in the production of cultural goods] is shattering without us yet knowing what is going to replace it" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 295). As demonstrated, this destruction of past principles is inherent in the archive itself, positioning it as an ideal starting point to reconstruct the relation between fans and producers in a more archontic and participatory nature that ultimately creates a more balanced distribution of power. The "question of the archive," as Derrida writes, "is not […] a question of the past. […] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (36). The archive does not uphold previous status and traditional entities but is subject to constant revision and review, displacing the past by new texts and approaches contributed by hitherto unrecognized parties. Instead of a one-dimensional focus on the meta-text and its producers, in this view, the fans, their participation, and agency become the "future"; their practices are a "promise" of

transformation—in short, by creating fanfiction and giving up the position of powerless consumers to redefine deep-seated understandings of authorship, text, and the relation between authors and readers they assume a "responsibility for tomorrow."

Positioning fanfiction as a democratic archive therefore enables a fundamental rethinking of the genre in terms of powerful participation, which previous approaches have neither allowed nor expressed in sufficient clarity. Just as Jenkins demands that "[w]e should change our theory every five thousand miles just like we change oil in our cars" (*Fans* 134), this new conceptualization represents fanfiction of the 2010s in a model better suited to the changes and challenges of the Web 2.0 era: Although some truth can be found in theorizing it as derivative, although the concept of poaching has been enormously influential and its emphasis on participation shaped fan studies for years to come, although the story tree discontinued individualizing stories and introduced the notion of the whole fictional universe, although both Bakhtinian dialogue and intertextuality stress valuable aspects of fanfiction in the prominence they give to communication—all of these neither characterize the practices of fanfiction writing as accurately as the idea of the archontic nor can they provide a similarly constructive basis for this dissertation and its discussion of the democratic potential of fanfiction and the ongoing redistribution of power between fans and producers.

Working with the *democratic archive* to reconceptualize Derrida's and Derecho's writings to even "better describ[e] what fanfic is" (Derecho 63), the following chapter is devoted to demonstrating the democratic in the texts of fanfiction—the fanauthors' strategies to demonstrate their participation, power, and authority in order to underline their claims to a fundamental transformation of the media industry and its production processes. Their Author's Notes, fannish jargon, and other mechanisms in both stories and their correspondent paratexts display the fans' agency, providing space for their express avowal of their position as active agents in their relation with the producers: Not only do "[w]e, the fans, make our own version of our favourite characters, and twist and bend them to our will" (hazel-3017) in an echo of US-American constructions of democracy but they exert power on the meta-text and its authors in a fundamentally democratic way since fannish strategies succeed in establishing that "the writers, the actors, and the fans are *all* involved […] in collectively creating the world of the [meta-text]" (CordeliaGray; my emphasis).

3. The Agency of the Fanauthor: A Strategic Transaction of Power in the Fan-Text

3.1 Studying Fanfiction: The Opportunities and Challenges within Fan-Texts

> "AN: So. A Coda to 6.10. So SPOILERS!
> […] Now, here's the thing. Season 6? In my opinion? Suckage. MAJOR suckage. I might go so far as to use the word epic. Robo-Sam, while amusing at times, is getting on my nerves, Dean has upped his emo to absolutely TRAUMATISING levels which even I'M having troubles handling […], Bobby barely gets any face time 'cause the writers are too busy trying to cram Grandpa-Skinner down our throats and Crowley…oh lord don't get me started on the lost potential of Crowley...
> Long story short. I am not a happy camper. But it was fine—I was gritting my teeth and hoping against hope that the season redeemed itself in the last half and things were BEARABLE because at least they hadn't messed with Cas.
> Yeah. Notice how I used the past tense there?
> You all know the part I'm talking about. It's the kiss that split the damn fandom and while I could have a good long rant about it these author's notes are already getting a bit lengthy. So let me just say this: Writers. Dudes. Of everyone, EVERYONE in the supernatural-verse you could have Cas kiss, you chose a freaking DEMON? The creatures Cas frequently seems to be trying to light on fire with his glare while he calls them 'abomination'? And not just any demon—oh no—you chose the one responsible for Jo and Ellen's deaths? Really writers? Are you that desperate for a freaking Castiel-gag-moment?
> AGH!
> Anyway. This fic—this is my coping mechanism. 'Cause […] I can certainly try to find a bright side to it. Or, y'know, carve one out of the mass of trauma ep 10 caused me.
> AN UPDATE […]: Thankyou to all who have reviewed, thanked or otherwise yelled at me—it really makes a girl feel the love :) Now, as many, MANY of you have asked—there WILL very likely be a follow on to this. Not sure yet if I'm going to just add another chapter or put it up as a sequel. […] So yes—thank you again! Y'all made my day by proving I wasn't the only one out there capable of epic fangirl ranting :P Cheers xx"
>
> Hatteress, "Humans Do It Better."

Fanauthor Hatteress is "not a happy camper." Her extensive Author's Notes to introduce her *Supernatural* story "Humans Do It Better" engage in a "good long rant" about the meta-text, focusing on the "kiss that split the damn fandom" between one of the show's protagonists, the angel and fan-favorite Castiel, or Cas, and a minor but potentially evil character, the demon Meg. In detail she discusses the elements of the meta-text that angered her in the course of season six, which she declares "MAJOR Suckage" as a whole but pronounces "BEARABLE because at least [the writers] hadn't messed with Cas." Dissatisfied with the most recent developments of the show in the tenth episode of the

season, Hatteress immediately lays all the blame on the producers of the meta-text, who she identifies as the ones responsible for her infuriation: "Writers. Dudes. Of everyone […] you could have Cas kiss, you chose a freaking DEMON? […] Really writers? Are you that desperate for a freaking Castiel-gag-moment?" While she acknowledges the superior influence of the writers on the meta-text since they "chose" what the script for the episode should include, Hatteress sees herself—and, in extension, her fellow fanauthors—in the position of being able to rectify the writers' "epic" shortcomings and the "suckage" they produced: "This fic," she announces, "is my coping mechanism"; accordingly, her story has Castiel first declare Meg a "shitty kisser" who "tasted of sulphur" before he proceeds to kiss Dean, the character who in (a substantial part of) fandom's opinion is Castiel's true love. Her statement makes clear that her writing is meant to provide an alternative—and to her, better—version of the episode's plot. Offering a different outcome of events that undoes the meta-text's failures and rights its fictional universe, Hatteress's story illustrates the agency fans reserve for themselves, since they do not have to content themselves with the "suckage" the writers produce but can simply alter the archive of the meta-text with their own writing to create a more satisfying text. The "UPDATE" Hatteress adds at a later point to her Author's Notes demonstrates how positively the community received her story, with "many, MANY" who "have reviewed, thanked or otherwise yelled" to show their appreciation of Hatteress's transformation of the meta-text.

Hatteress's Author's Notes convey an instructive and illuminating impression of the fanfiction community's strategies of appropriation, demonstrating agency, and claiming power. She points out the failures of the meta-text, offers her own story as an alternative, and has her fellow writers and readers participate in her writing by attributing them with her "likely" expansion of her story. Accordingly, little room is left for the producers of the meta-text, who are relegated to the source of Hatteress's anger but are stripped of any influence and power in the larger context of fanfiction writing. The story, after all, functions as a "coping mechanism" that supersedes the negative emotions the meta-text elicited, thus demonstrating the power of the fanauthor's text. What is significant in addition to the agency Hatteress displays in her Author's Notes is the story's striking insistence on the fanon and the fans' power to create it in fundamental alteration of or opposition to the fictional universe of the meta-text: Following fandom's belief in Castiel and Dean belonging together, "Humans Do It Better" evidences Hatteress's

preference for Castiel kissing the male character of Dean instead of the female demon Meg and thus signifies a powerful fannish appropriation and transformation of the meta-text. By substituting Meg for Dean, her story functions as an example of the widely popular slash genre, in which fanauthors reconceptualize the heteronormative universe of the meta-text into the 'homo-normative' universe of fandom to exert significant influence on the fannish archive.[57]

The example of Hatteress's Author's Notes and her story "Humans Do It Better" therefore offers a glimpse into the fannish construction of their own authority, power, and agency, which allows them to assert ownership over the whole archive of the meta-text, including the meta-text itself. Evidenced by Hatteress's words, the contemporary process of fannish empowerment can consequently not be seen as isolated from their own textual production but is immediately dependent on the fan-created text, originating from and manifesting itself in the stories and paratexts of fanfiction. Their texts are the basis for their communal life, they are the link between individuals from all over the world that participate in fanfiction, and they, I claim, represent the first instance where fanauthors express their agency and authority. Filling a considerable gap in previous scholarship with focusing on the very center of the genre—the fan-produced text—, my research has accordingly uncovered how fanwriters invest considerable effort in substantiating and justifying their claims to increased participation in their texts, working with powerful strategies that affirm their agency: It is there where they truly become fanauthors in their own right, an active party in meaning-making and processes of production.

[57] Highly transformational, slash is characterized by the fact that the heterosexual (and mostly male) characters of the meta-text are portrayed as homosexual in fanfiction but are so in a world that is almost universally made up of male-male relationships. These are therefore considered the norm and attract no particular attention from their environment, which leads me to referring to fandom as 'homo-normative' in distinct modification of Lisa Duggan's definition of homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50).

Slash is one of the most widely researched aspects of fanfiction, with numerous scholars engaging in debates about its characteristics, possible explanations for its immense popularity, and its constructions of sex and gender. For slash in general, cf., for example: Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 185-222; Jenkins, "'Out'"; Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* 228-54; Russ; Penley, "Feminism"; Cicioni; Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 90-115; Bury, *Cyberspaces* 71-99; Woledge, "Slash"; Woledge, "Intimatopia"; Tosenberger, "Homosexuality"; Lothian, Busse, and Reid; Busse, "Digital"; Reid, "Thrusts"; Marx; Kelly; Katyal; Susanne Jung; Hunting; Cumberland; Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, and Biltereyst; Shave; Salmon and Symons; Falzone; Gwenllian Jones, "Sex Lives"; Kustritz; Saxey. For slash in *Supernatural*, cf., for example: Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 74-110; Tosenberger, "'epic'"; Flegel and Roth; Schmidt; Åström.

Based on my findings, I accordingly argue in this chapter that, first, fans liberate the meta-text from the voice of its creator(s) and eliminate its presence, and, secondly, that they create their own voice and establish their visibility via a number of distinct textual strategies that can be found in any fanfiction text. While these mechanisms may be relatively implicit if the story is not supplemented by any kind of paratext and/or belongs to the "'affirmational'" part of fandom, most fanfiction stories can be defined as "'[t]ransformational' fandom" (obsession_inc)[58] and therefore tend to exhibit a multi-dimensional variety of such appropriative strategies in the story text and their frequently rather copious paratext. Explicitly engaging in appropriating the meta-text and demonstrating the fanauthors' successful transfer of power and authority, the fan-text consequently constitutes a major factor in the construction of the fannish identity, i.e. as active participants in the production of cultural artifacts.

Textual liberation and the creation of a fannish voice are thus the two main objectives of fanwriters, which have spawned a wide variety of strategies—such as different story genres or specific forms of Author's Notes—to truly demonstrate fannish claims that "texts reside in the hands of the fans" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 8). The fannish archive with its emphasis on the equality of its entries and its displacement of the original author continuously illustrates the intense and overwhelming presence of the

[58] According to obsession_inc's by now established definition, which has also found entry into academic fan studies (cf. Leow; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 150-51), in "'affirmational' fandom, the source material is re-stated, the author's purpose divined to the community's satisfaction, rules established on how the characters are and how the universe works […]. This is the very most awesome type of fandom for the source creator to hang out with, because the creator holds the magic trump card of Because I'm The Only One Who Really Knows, That's Why, and that is accepted as a legitimate thing." As these affirmational fans mostly do not write fanfiction because the genre demands an inherent belief in the "death of the Author" (Barthes, *Image* 148), most of fanfiction belongs to transformational fandom which "is all about laying hands upon the source and twisting it to the fans' own purposes, whether that is to fix a disappointing issue […] in the source material, or using the source material to illustrate a point, or just to have a whale of a good time. It [is] largely a democracy of taste; everyone has their own shot at declaring what the source material means, and at radically re-interpreting it" (obsession_inc).

The concept of differentiating between the two approaches to fandom first spread among fans and was then picked up by aca-fans, i.e. people "who participate in fandom and academia and who produce work for both audiences" (Reid, "Remaking" 179; cf. Hills, *Fan Cultures* 1-24). Foremost, they see the difference between affirmational and transformational fandom as highly gendered, with men rather belonging to the former and women practicing the latter (Scott, "Dawn" 441-42; Wallis 119). In contrast to previous scholarship, however, I would like to stress that the difference between affirmational and transformational fandom above all represents the difference between being a fanfiction writer and being a fan (of media-based meta-texts, sports, music, etc.): Fanauthors engage with their object of fandom in transformative action, finding fault with it despite their positive emotional attachment, whereas fans in general tend to affirm their favorite movie, soccer team, or music band quasi unconditionally (cf. Abercrombie and Longhurst 44).

means fans employ in executing and implementing their "textual coup" to establish a "more democratic view" (Coker 83) of authorship, text, production, and the relation of author and audience. As such, the stories themselves contain profuse displays of fannish agency when fans, for instance, create slash fanfiction that deconstructs normative structures of sex, gender, and sexuality to provide a non-normative alternative to conventional power structures (cf. Kane 103-06; Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, and Biltereyst 335-38; Creekmur and Doty; Falzone 249-50; Kelly 72). Similarly, the popular genre of *Mary Sue*, briefly defined as stories in which an avatar of the fanauthor him-/herself appears as an integral part of the plot (cf. Pflieger; "Mary Sue"), can be read as a means of appropriation, since fans not only 'personally' appear in the textual archive but affect the fictional universe according to their own desires and purposes (cf. chapter 3.4). As these brief examples illustrate, the fanfiction stories therefore constitute a rich resource for studying fannish strategies of demonstrating their power and claiming authority.

Although there is—with the possible exception of slash—a pronounced desideratum in studies that focus on the fans' tactical usage of fanfiction's genres to establish themselves as a powerful party with claims to ownership and participation in the meta-text and its archive,[59] this dissertation foremost intends to shed light on an even more neglected area of research, namely the paratexts that accompany the stories. An integral part of the archive and fannish text production, they are fundamentally understudied and have not yet received any of the scholarly attention they deserve due to their significant presence and function in the construction of fannish identity. Spaces of intense communication among the fanauthors (R. Black, *Adolescents* 28), paratextual categories such as Author's Notes or the fannish jargon that dominates their language accordingly provide an excellent field of study for the strategies fans employ in reconstructing the power structures in fanfiction writing. As Hatteress's above quoted Author's Notes

[59] Slash, as I have shown before, has been researched rather extensively, even if only a few of the studies concern themselves with the genre's contribution to fannish agency. For this, cf. mainly the abovementioned works by Kathryn Kane; Frederik Dhaenens, Sofie Van Bauwel, and Daniel Biltereyst; Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty; Peter Falzone; and Brigid Kelly.

As chapter 3.4 of this dissertation discusses some of the possible ways stories express fans' agency, I include here only a few references to previous research that deals with this issue: Apart from early studies on slash (cf. Russ; Lamb and Veith), Jenkins launched the subject with his subchapter in *Textual Poachers* on "Ten Ways to Rewrite a Television Show" (162-77) that introduces the "community's characteristic strategies of interpretation, appropriation, and reconstruction" (162). The power of Mary Sues was first addressed in Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (94-102); also cf. Chander and Sunder; Willis. In addition, Kristina Busse offers a brief analysis of *RPF/RPS*, i.e. Real Person Fiction/Real Person Slash ("Digital"; "'I'm jealous'"; "My Life").

illustrate, these texts at the threshold between the non-fictional world and the fictional realm of the story offer to researchers particularly deep insights into how fanauthors position themselves in the increasingly dissolving dichotomy of audience and author. Arguing that the voice of the fanauthors can be more distinctly heard in the transitional and transactional space of the paratext than in the story world, this dissertation seeks to extricate fannish paratext from the fringes of scholarly attention: Among the very few works that as of yet mention it, it thus constitutes the first major study that dedicates itself to paratext in fanfiction and acknowledges the fundamental significance of fannish paratext in a context at the heart of the genre.

Based on Gérard Genette's seminal description and definition of paratexts as the "thresholds of interpretation" in his eponymous monograph, this thesis therefore decidedly extends and enriches Rebecca W. Black's work, whose research findings partially draw on Author's Notes, Claudia Rebaza's dissertation, which briefly refers to fannish jargon, and the even scarcer references to paratext in a limited number of studies by other scholars.[60] Focusing on the paramount role fannish paratext assumes in the negotiation of power and the construction of the fanauthors' identity as active producers, this study thus, on the one hand, contributes to—or even initiates—the decreasing marginalization in fan studies this textual category deserves; on the other hand, its considerably more important goal consists of creating (new) insights into fannish strategies of assuming and demonstrating interpretational sovereignty over the meta-text, of affirming their right to participate in its interpretation and production, of positioning themselves as the true owners of the meta-textual archive, and, in the end, to reconstruct themselves as producers whose activities revolutionize encrusted power structures in the media landscape. In short, this dissertation is meant to respond to Katherine E. Morrissey's call for a new responsibility of fan

[60] With their findings only moderately related to my research interests in this dissertation, R. Black works on the identity-building of non-native speakers of English in fanfiction, focusing on their interaction with fellow fans in Author's Notes, reviews, etc. (*Adolescents* 66-115; "Language" 175-82; "Digital Design" 121-30; "Convergence" 133-40); Rebaza's dissertation briefly addresses fannish jargon in her study of a small group of fanwriters in a specific *LiveJournal* group, mentioning that its terminology derives from several different Internet spaces (65-75).

Other than those studies, as of yet only Sirpa Leppänen even mentions Author's Notes in a brief side note (73), while fannish jargon is addressed in a mere handful of references that comment on its complex nature (cf. Hellekson 113; Marx 10; Merrick); out of the various other categories of fannish paratext, only feedback, or reviews of the story by the readers, has received a somewhat considerable degree of attention (cf. R. Black, *Adolescents* 97-115; R. Black, "Digital Design"; Rebaza 80-122; Kneale), whereas disclaimers, for example, merely feature in discussions of the legality of fanfiction but are hardly ever mentioned in contexts of fannish agency (cf. Scafidi 123; Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 665, 678; Saxey 208).

studies: "In our current moment," she writes in late 2013, "issues of [fans'] power, agency, and representation within cultural production greatly need our focus."

To achieve this goal of shedding light on fannish "power, agency, and representation within cultural production," my thesis draws upon a comparatively large corpus of texts,[61] located at the online archive *FanFiction.Net* (*FF.Net*), which is the largest and most readily accessible collection of fanfiction stories online. Founded on 15 October 1998 by Los Angeles-based software designer Xing Li, the website quickly became one of the most popular spaces for the fanfiction community where fanauthors flocked to due to the ease the site offers for publishing stories and interacting with other writers: Although *FanFiction.Net* stopped publicizing its statistics on the overall numbers of stories hosted and authors registered in 2001, estimates based on available numbers such as the number of stories in individual fandoms suggest that today the website hosts somewhere in the vicinity of ten to eleven million stories, written by about 2.5 million authors.[62]

From its beginning onwards, *Fanfiction.Net* has been set up as an automated archive, i.e. registered authors can upload their stories without any support or interference by the website's administrators, which, on the one hand, leads to a quick posting process and, within *FF.Net*'s guidelines,[63] maximal liberation of fanwriters to "unleash [their] imagination" as the website's motto calls for; on the other, the archive has therefore

[61] By and large, studies of fanfiction tend to focus on a very restricted number of texts (cf. Rebaza 4-5; Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* 26; Grandi) or draw on the long-time fannish experience of the researchers without naming the corpus of texts or the communities referred to in detail. Cf., for example, Jenkins's reference to "an amorphous but still identifiable grouping of enthusiasts of film and television which calls itself 'media fandom.' This groups embraces not a single text or even a single genre but many texts—American and British dramatic series, Hollywood genre films, comic books, Japanese animation, popular fiction" (*Textual Poachers* 1); the texts he specifically addresses in his book are enumerated over twenty pages in the appendix (288-308).

[62] The number of authors on *FanFiction.Net* is particularly difficult to determine. Based on Alixe's research project on the website, which resulted in an estimated guess of each author posting an average number of 4.2 stories, 2.5 million writers would, however, not make an unreasonable number.

Detailedly researching *FF.Net* in 2011, Alixe drew up additional statistics on, for instance, the authors' sex, country of origin, and age, the most popular fandoms, story genres, developments within individual categories, etc. Only available in French, her research provides a long-sought expansion to my own statistical work on the site in 2003-2004 and 2008-2009 (unpublished), *Fanlore*'s data ("FanFiction.Net"), or Mary Ellen Curtin's statistics collected 2000-2002, the three of which represent the only significant analyses of *FF.Net* available.

[63] *FanFiction.Net*'s "Rules and Guidelines" (accessible to registered members only) state, for instance, that "[s]tories with non-historical and non-fictional characters: actors, musicians, and etc." cannot be uploaded, or that each "[e]ntry must be given the proper rating. No exceptions."

garnered "a reputation for being indiscriminate in story quality among members of many different fannish circles" ("FanFiction.Net"). Notwithstanding the comparatively lower status *FanFiction.Net* may have in some corners of fandom, it is this liberal policy that represents its greatest advantage, since it grants all power to the community in terms of what they want to post and what they want to read. In contrast to websites such as the *Lord of the Rings* archive *Henneth Annun*, whose intention is not only "to provide our readers with a selection of the *best* JRRT [J.R.R. Tolkien] fan fiction," i.e. stories that are "*well-written*, imaginative, [and] engaging" ("About HASA"; my emphasis), but which even used to subject stories to a peer review process (cf. Lee), *FanFiction.Net* offers the chance to study fanfiction and its writers in a space largely uncontrolled by both fandom-internal and fandom-external forces.

Since *FF.Net* therefore grants individual fans the agency to fully determine the content of their texts in addition to being accessible to any Internet user since readers-only do not even have to be registered, the website thus functions as a public and democratic space that puts utmost emphasis on openness and participation: "What strikes me about […] ff.net […] is that the participation is itself the point," writes, for instance, the fan Lucy Gillam in an essay that explores the participatory nature of the website ("Gather"). Aside from enabling anyone to access the archive and ensuring their freedom to read or write—in short, to contribute to the fandom and its fictional universe—, *FF.Net*'s focus clearly lies on the community and the interaction among its members. Its easy system of offering reviews or engaging in private messaging facilitates a maximum of interaction between participants and the assurance that every voice is heard: While the stories remain in the foreground, "the site is constructed in a way that allows for a great deal of interplay between the content organization and the interactional organization" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 38). Underscoring *FanFiction.Net*'s democratic setup, both scholars and fans time and again stress the significance participation assumes in this online archive: "FanFiction.net," acknowledges Clay Shirky, "doesn't just aggregate stories; it hosts a community in constant conversation with itself" (*Cognitive Surplus* 90); a statement again echoed by Lucy Gillam's recognition of how *FF.Net* "is less an archive in which finished stories are housed than a community in which the participatory process of constructing the story is as important if not more so than the finished product. […] The goal seems to be […] the experience of interacting" ("Gather").

This focus on interaction and the integration of fans of whatever origin, background, and affiliation has led me to selecting *FanFiction.Net* as a basis for my research since its very design mirrors what the genre of fanfiction is about; namely the participation of multiple voices in processes of creation and production. Moreover, numerous accounts attest to the user-friendly setup, quick to navigate structure, and the "many options" it provides "for users to contribute to and shape the site content" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 40), thus establishing *FanFiction.Net* as an online archive that parallels as closely as possible the genre's inner structure of archontic literature—an archive that works without hierarchies and with the greatest extent of participation possible. Ultimately, it is thus the site's open and participatory—its democratic—setup that suggested favoring a study based on *FF.Net* over sites more difficult to work with and thus more restrictive in the writers and stories represented.

An additional point I considered was the number of stories and authors featured at the site, since I sought to work on as large and heterogeneous a section of fanfiction as feasible: With the ten to eleven million stories on *FF.Net* certainly providing a (more) representative cross-section of the multiplicity of fandom and its various voices than other sites,[64] they adequately represent the fact that "[f]andom is far from univocal" (Wills) and that it is accordingly "impossible […] to speak of a single fandom" (Busse and Hellekson, "Introduction" 6). Working with the "largest fanfiction archive on the Internet" ("FanFiction.Net") nevertheless necessitated a considerable narrowing down of sources. Due to the criterion of representativeness only large fandoms were eligible for my study, and, for the sake of embracing fanfiction's diversity, their respective meta-texts needed to belong to different media categories. In this way, I first decided upon choosing texts from the particularly popular and much-worked-on formats of books, movies, and TV shows; subsequently, I selected the respectively largest fandoms from each category, while deliberately exempting the comparatively well-researched *Harry Potter* fandom in order

[64] Representation was the one crucial criterion that had me decide against using the fan-controlled *Archive of Our Own*, which, though steadily increasing in outreach and importance since its launch in 2008 (cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 19; Morrissey; "Archive of Our Own"), does not (yet) host nearly the same share of stories and authors as *FF.Net*.

To give a brief example: In late September of 2015, the fandoms of *Twilight*, *Supernatural*, and *Star Wars* reached an aggregate number of roughly 363,000 texts on *FanFiction.Net* but only about 126,000 at the *Archive of Our Own*. Moreover, fandoms are represented to very different degree: While *Twilight*'s 218,000 texts make it the second most popular category on *FF.Net* in total, its less than 5,000 stories at the *Archive of Our Own* in comparison are almost negligible, which may speak for a different fan demographic frequenting the two sites.

to focus on representative but rather understudied texts: As such, my corpus for this thesis comprises the fanfiction written in the fandoms of *Twilight*, *Star Wars*, and *Supernatural*[65] archived at *FanFiction.Net*. Large fandoms with several tens of thousands stories each and more than 360,000 altogether to account for the participatory character of the genre, they reflect both the origins of fanfiction in US-American culture and the, albeit decreasing but still apparent, predominance of US-American meta-texts. Moreover, the three fandoms represent meta-texts that prominently embody the fannish conceptualization of texts as "never solidified, calcified, or at rest" (Derecho 77): They are "texts that *become* and that will continue to become" (J. Gray, "When Is" 94) due to their nature as, first, a four-part book series (2005-2008) that was adapted for the cinema in five installments (2008-2012); secondly, a huge franchise whose seven movies span almost forty years (1977-2015) and that has generated numerous novel, comic, television, game, and radio spin-offs; and thirdly, a TV show that has been on air since 2005 and reliably continues to churn out more than 20 episodes a year.

In the end, my procedure of selecting *Twilight*, *Star Wars*, and *Supernatural* was informed by two premises, which I regard as integral to scholarly work within fan studies: First, as mentioned, the fandoms researched need to be large and diverse, which guarantees a (more) representative cross-section of both stories and their authors; secondly, I intentionally sought to avoid the trap many fan studies researchers fall into: Namely, to limit their studies to fandoms they themselves are fans of, which tends to create considerable difficulty to maintain an adequate academic or professional stance (cf., for example, Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 36-55; Hills, *Fan Cultures* 1-21; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 7): By definition, fans are emotionally attached to their object of fandom, and therefore "distance is antithetical to fandom, where holding the fannish object close is integral to the pleasure" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 47), which leads to the specific pitfalls of fan studies work: Enthusiastic 'fanboys' or 'fangirls' (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 4), researchers who self-identify as fans need to "acknowledge the inherent dangers of being part of the community analyzed and the biases this may create in terms of objectivity and selection of analyzed works" (Busse and Hellekson, "Identity" 41).

[65] When I began my research in July 2010, *Supernatural* was still the largest fandom in the category of TV shows; in late 2013, however, it was, surpassed by *Glee*, but has re-won the first position in summer of 2015.

To enable researchers to bridge this gap between their fan communities and their academic communities, the latter of which "caution against excessive emotional intimacy" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 47), Jenkins, Hills, and other fan studies scholars developed the concept of the aca-fan.[66] Building on the premise that fans and researchers are not too dissimilar in that they are "both passionate, acquisitive and seek as much information about their objects of interest as they can get, often down to minutiae that others might consider obsessive" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 44), the aca-fan, in Matt Hills' influential definition, "must still conform to the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject, being careful not to present too much of their enthusiasms while tailoring their accounts of fan interest and investment to the norms of […] academic writing" (*Fan Cultures* 11-12). First considered a possibility for researchers to integrate their fannish interests into academia all the while conforming to the demands of scholarship, assuming the identity of the aca-fan turned out to be not necessarily unproblematic. Keeping distance from fandom that defines itself by emotion created a moral dualism that tended to misrepresent fans while it simultaneously compromised the scholarly work done on them: Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, for example, did extensive research on their favorite fandom of *Supernatural*, only to conclude that "[o]ur attempt to be both enthusiastic emotional fangirls and rational researchers proved a difficult fence to straddle. And despite our best intentions, we found that the hybrid text we wanted to write could not be written" (*Fandom* 53).[67] Moreover, fandom does not necessarily appreciate being an object of study, with frequent occurrences of researchers who openly identify as aca-fen (with *fen* the fannish plural of *fan*) shunned and excluded: "As far as the fans are concerned," write Zubernis and Larsen, "aca-fans are clearly 'other'" (*Fandom* 51).

[66] On the concept of the aca-fan in general, its development, challenges, and continuous tradition in fan studies, cf., for example: Hills, *Fan Cultures* 1-21; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 36-55; Busse and Hellekson, "Identity" 38-56; Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 4-6. Of particular value are moreover the discussions about "Acafandom and Beyond," which Henry Jenkins conducted with notable fan studies scholars, among them Louisa Stein, Karen Hellekson, Nancy Baym, Alexis Lothian, Jason Mittell, Rhiannon Bury, and many others, over the course of the summer of 2011, and which he subsequently posted to his blog—coincidently named "Confessions of an Aca-Fan"—in 26 installments from 13 June until 22 Oct. 2011.

[67] Interestingly enough, the solution Zubernis and Larsen conceived for this "difficult fence to straddle" was to write two books: The first, *Fandom at the Crossroads*, was published in late 2012 and provided the academic point of view (38); the second, *Fangasm: Supernatural Fangirls*, was published in late 2013 and is the story of how "research took a back seat," the "story of our shared obsession and the friendship that sustains us through 4 am line-ups, overtaxed credit cards, canceled flights and airport camp-outs, and of course the occasional accusations of insanity" (*Fangasm!—When Academics Go to Hollywood*).

Aside from these disadvantages, situating oneself as an aca-fan moreover poses an "ethical challenge" since, "[e]ven if we see ourselves as fans first, we occupy a position of power, able to influence public perception and select which semiprivate utterances get more attention and validation" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 6). Aware of these downsides, other scholars have sought to distance themselves consciously from the concept, either by clearly highlighting their fannish identity (cf. Bury, *Cyberspaces*; Sandvoss) or denying participation such as Nina Baym, who "was never involved in fanfic or vidding communities" and only "stud[ies] people, not texts" (qtd. in Jenkins, "Acafandom"). In the end, however, none of these three approaches has yielded completely satisfying results or has escaped the need to contend with adversaries who point out the lack of either distance or emotion or an inability to reconcile the two. In contrast, this dissertation seeks to neither engage in the privileging nor Othering of certain corners of fandom or fannish communities and, moreover, seeks to avoid having "to straddle" the aca-fannish "difficult fence" of mediating between distance and emotion. Instead, this thesis assumes a new methodology, which deliberately strives to balance out the advantages and disadvantages of each approach and to present a more equitable study of fandom.

The decision to use *Supernatural*, *Star Wars*, and *Twilight* for a corpus was therefore substantially supported by the chance these fandoms offer in terms of positioning myself: Approaching the three meta-texts from the widely different stances of fan, non-fan, and anti-fan, I aim at eliminating—or at least reducing—the shortcomings of the abovementioned approaches of aca-fan/fan/non-participant, arriving at as balanced a representation of fanfiction as possible. Significant to my own position as a researcher, a brief fan-ography has therefore identify myself as an avid fan of the TV show of *Supernatural*; a rather indifferent moviegoer in respect to *Star Wars*—a "non-fan" in Jonathan Gray's terms, since he reserves this term for "viewers or readers who do view or read a text, but not with any intense involvement" ("New Audiences" 74; also cf. Alters); and, last but not least, I identify as an "anti-fan" of *Twilight*, i.e. as someone who, though having had contact with both books and movies in addition to scholarly work on the series, "strongly dislike[s] a given text" (J. Gray, "New Audiences 70; also cf. J. Gray, "Antifandom"; Theodoropoulou; Sheffield and Merlo; Alters). Taking together a positively connoted, a rather 'non-connoted,' and a negatively connoted area of research, my dissertation thus intends to avoid the traps of distance vs. emotion and to provide a

both academic and fannish representation of fanfiction without having to resort to the construct of the aca-fan—in short, it intends to be the "hybrid text" Zubernis and Larsen "wanted to write but could not" (*Fandom* 53).

Concentrating on fannish paratexts in this part of my dissertation constitutes another safeguard against falling into the abovementioned traps of too great an emotional connection or too great an academic distance and thus provides an additional advantage to studying this widely neglected area of fannish production. As paratexts are situated in a liminal space and constitute a "*threshold*," as Gérard Genette writes, "an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, […] a zone between text and off-text" (2), they enable the fanauthors to mediate between the realm of the story world and the non-fictional world; they enable them to reconcile and negotiate their fannish identities with anything outside of fanfiction, be that the meta-text, their personal life, individual reading preferences, or copyright issues. Referring to the perceived "wishy washy" (Lady Amber Vivienne) quality of the meta-text in their Author's Notes, asserting the "[l]egalities" in their disclaimers of how "Supernatural does not belong to me, although I wish it did" (Stryder2008), or warning other readers that "[t]his story contains incest" so as to give them the chance to "not read if this squicks you" (Sorrel), fans use the paratextual categories of fanfiction to negotiate between the two areas of "the inside and the outside" without leaving the space of the fanfiction community.

Characterized by this permanent mediation, fannish paratexts such as Author's Notes, disclaimers, and warnings, or the specific jargon they employ in them become an ideal frame for studying the interaction between the fanauthors and the producers of the meta-text, since this relation is dominated by a powerful need to negotiate: Not only do the two parties engage in an intense debate of agency and participation in general but, I claim, this genre-defining negotiation takes place in these very paratexts, since they are composed not only for the fannish community but in direct reference to the meta-text and its creators. The texts that accompany the stories enable the fanauthors to stake their claims in a liminal space that crosses the boundaries between fanfiction writing and the outside world; they constitute powerful "*threshold*[*s*]," while the stories—albeit essential in the ultimate transformation of the meta-text and contributing the major share of the fannish archive—are one step further removed from what Genette calls "off-text" and thus somewhat less suited for direct negotiation due to being fully fictional.

Paratexts as the "fan writer's direct communications with the audience" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 28) are thus a category inherently imbued with power as they are situated in a liminal space that enables negotiation. Supplementing their stories in a long-time practice of fanfiction writing, fans have developed a number of different categories of paratext that each fulfills divergent functions in addressing fellow fanauthors or prompting interaction with outside instances. Fanfiction knows and differentiates between numerous types of paratext—at present, *Fanlore* lists 17 without cataloging any fandom-specific ones ("Headers")—, and while most stories do not feature all or even a majority of them, none opts to forego them completely as they convey not only information about the story but also overtly mark the text as fannish, situating it firmly within the community, its life, and history. Accordingly, stories tend to be introduced by a variety of paratexts that often come with a rich history of conflict, which the at times seemingly easily accessible labels of "warnings," "pairings," "summaries," or even "word counts"[68] obscure but which creates an additional layer of understanding and complexity for fanauthors 'in the know.' Although their length and detail vary to a great extent according to a fanwriter's own preferences or the requirements of a specific archive, the wealth of paratextual forms fans have developed represents a crucial means of framing the story text and constituting it for its readers (Allen 103), with each type assuming different functions in questions of fannish agency and power.

Paratexts are thus a prominent feature of fanfiction writing, with the fans utilizing the space they offer to communicate significant information about their stories, their conceptualization of the meta-text, and their self-identification as fanauthors and members

[68] Warnings, to provide a brief insight into the complexity of fannish paratext, inform readers about "potentially disturbing content" ("Warnings") such as explicitly described sexual practices or violence but are often seen as an author's (undue) intrusion into the audience's reception of the story. Moreover, recent fan debates have focused on how the word *warning* itself could be considered offensive to readers: As sexual practices are warned for particularly frequently, fans argue that choosing to list them under the label of *warning* signifies an author's moral stance and thus insults other fans' reading preferences. Consequently, warnings are now often reworded or their contents included in Author's Notes.

Pairings denote the individual partners in a romantic/sexual relationship a specific story focuses on; a high variety of possible ways to visualize the pairing via different expressions of jargon (*K/S*, *Obidala*, *ExB*, or *Wincest*, to just name a few) frequently leads to confusion among fans from different fandoms and traditions.

Summaries comprise a space of intense conflict because of their contents and length, with fans harboring different point of views as to how they 'advertise' their stories from providing a brief summary of the plot, quoting a section, referencing the characters and pairings, to simply pleading for reviews.

The word count of stories alludes to the different genres of fanfiction, with non-fans excluded from interpreting a word count of 100 or 200 to refer to the highly popular genre of *drabble* (whose exact word count is in turn sometimes disputed).

of a powerful community. Evidenced by Hatteress's Author's Notes quoted in the beginning which negotiate between the meta-text and fandom and transition from the meta-text to the story text, the different categories of paratext provide fans with the chance to put their claims into writing: Paratext becomes the space for fanauthors to make visible how they eliminate the producers' voices from the fannish archive and how they replace them by their own voices. It is here where KissMeDeadlyT-T invites her readers to "[u]se your imaginations," challenging them to write more stories with her favorite pairing to make it more "canon than it already is," and where RayneSummer avers that "in light of the recent episode" her story "demanded to be written" in order to put a decidedly fannish spin on the meta-text.

This inherently significant function of paratexts in the fans' self-identification and communication of their role makes them ideally suited for studying the textual strategies of fans to demonstrate their agency and power—to confirm, first, their position as active fanwriters and producers who transform the meta-text and, secondly, their position as agents whose opinions and activities need to be represented in the production of the meta-text. Accordingly, the much understudied paratext makes up the large bulk of the chapter, while the comparatively well-studied stories only feature in parts of the third subchapter, where I discuss additional strategies of empowerment. For the first subchapter, I selected Author's Notes as one of the most popular categories of paratext, since they are particularly essential in establishing the powerful identity of individual fans and the whole community: They represent "an author's personal notes about the story, writing experience, or whatever else the author wants to talk to their readers about" (Moonbeam), which defines them as one of the most diverse and personal types of paratext so as to make them particularly apt for analysis in respect to the purposes of this dissertation. Author's Notes, as I illustrate in the following, contain crucial statements in terms of the fans' self-construction as authors and communicate their conceptualization of power within the genre and in its relation to the media landscape. In them, fans show how they utilize manifold approaches to the figure and role of the author in order to define themselves as powerful agents in a participatory and democratic setting—they are fanauthors, producers in their own right.

As mentioned, the second section of this chapter also focuses on fannish paratext but, in contrast to the singular category Author's Notes, I here intentionally chose to apply a more global approach: As fannish jargon, or *fanspeak* in the fans' own terms, occurs in

all types of paratext, it lends an additional perspective to my research, enabling me to present the construction of fannish agency and power in a more thorough and representative way. With its highly complex terminology, fanspeak assumes a significant role in the construction of the fannish community as it allows fans to sharply separate between insiders and outsiders of fandom while it simultaneously constitutes a threshold for new members and provides cohesion. As it moreover supports the fans in their self-identification as powerful experts in different realms of fandom and the meta-text, it establishes fannish agency in a two-fold way and therefore represents a strategy of empowerment that defines fanfiction's writers as superior to the meta-text's producers to the end of subverting traditional hierarchies and conventions.

Supplemented by a last subchapter that introduces the strategic appropriation taking place in the paratextual category of disclaimers and in the story genres of Mary Sue and RPF/RPS, this chapter aims at illustrating the textual strategies fanauthors have at their disposal to establish themselves as powerful participants in the creation of culture—both with their production of fanfiction and in the production of the meta-text. They employ deliberate mechanisms in their writing that signifies their "cultural authority" ("Fans" 119) and reframes the copyrighted meta-texts as "shared cultural resources" (Clerc 53), which are free to be transformed into archontic texts by fannish activities. "Participation is Magic," as Derek Johnson titles a 2013 essay on collaborative fan production, affirming how "creativity" ceases to be the "realm of authors, but [becomes] the province of a more dispersed group of collaborative participators" (135). As a site that enables this 'trans-action' of power from authors to the fannish communities, paratext therefore assumes a fundamental role in fanfiction writing: It is there that fans strategically appropriate the meta-texts, affirm their own claims, and prepare the grounds for the transformation of the meta-text in their stories. In short, the liminal space of paratext becomes a "*threshold*" where the established hegemony of the producers transitions into a more democratic set-up of the media landscape—it becomes a "*threshold*" from the past of the "Author-God" into the future of "we, the fans."

3.2 The Powerful Author: Strategies of Author Construction in Author's Notes

"So," begins Hatteress her Author's Notes quoted at the beginning of this chapter, launching into an extensive "rant" in communicating to her fellow fanauthors as to how her intense frustration with the latest plot developments put on screen by the "[w]riters" of *Supernatural* have resulted in her creating "[t]his fic" as a "coping mechanism." As discussed above in detail, Hatteress—like so many other fans—distinctly positions herself in her Author's Notes, or, more commonly *A/N*(*s*), in regard to the meta-text, its producers, and her own fanfiction community, assuming a markedly fannish author role to construct herself as an active and powerful participant in the creation of culture. Exemplarily, her Author's Notes verbalize the intricacies of the fannish model of authorship, displaying a complex approach to the three major interpretations of the figure of the author Western cultural history has seen so far, namely the divine Romantic genius, the dead author, and a collaborative multiple author (cf., for example, Barthes, *Image* 142-48; Hartley; Busse, "Return" 50-54; Jaszi and Woodmansee; Bennett).

Conceptualizing her own role in a complex intertwining of these different models of authorship, Hatteress's A/Ns constitute a prime example of the paradigms fans use in redefining and reframing themselves from passive consumers to active creators. As my research has uncovered, fanauthors who are dissatisfied with the hegemonial and quasi-divine status of the producers of the meta-text (Hartley 24-25) employ a threefold approach in stripping them from the "super powers ascribed to them" (Johnson and Gray 2) and transferring interpretational sovereignty to themselves—they construct a distinctly fannish author identity that encompasses aspects of *all* the author constructions mentioned above. Giving fans the chance to directly communicate with their audience in a paratextual threshold situation, A/Ns allow them to simultaneously write in the role of the "Author-God" of Romanticism, Barthes's dead author, and as part of their own collaborative multiplicity—each of which, or, despite their obviously inherent paradoxes, the combination of which, helps them to constitute their power and agency as fanfiction writers and to establish a new identity as *fanauthors*: Clearly, fanauthors use their Author's Notes to ensure that their voice is heard, to establish their presence, and to enforce their visibility in order to provide a salient example of fannish power.

While specifically addressed to both the story's readers and—symbolically—to the authors of the meta-text alike, Author's Notes thus make use of different subject positions to draw on each for consolidating fannish status. Often fulfilling nearly opposing

functions, Author's Notes on the one hand constitute the fans' authority over the meta-text, their story, its characters and narrative, and their own fannish readership by focusing on the agency of the individual fanwriter; on the other hand, they provide an opportunity to reach out to the community in order to negotiate audience expectations, invite feedback, or prompt interaction to confirm the importance of a multiplicity of voices coming together in fanfiction. As both acts articulate the fannish disregard for the meta-text and emphasize the significance of the readers' participation in the creation of a story, A/Ns acquire a central function in imbuing power to the concept of 'audience'—whether that be the fandom at large, whose members are no longer passive consumers, or an individual fan, whose writing contributes to the archive. Communicating different models of authorship, Author's Notes thus allow fans to fundamentally reconstruct their position; in Author's Notes, they first become a powerful audience to then construe themselves as powerful participants in an increasingly democratic production of culture.

Apart from affirming the powerful fanauthor, the complex construction of the author role in A/Ns also demonstrates the fans' clear awareness of the power negotiations that have shaped the fanfiction community for decades: While fanwriters underline their right to interpret and transform the meta-text through their status as fans and writers whose ideas matter, they nevertheless attempt to direct their audience along their own characterizations and emotional and narrative journeys, enforcing a certain pre-mediated reading position that they in turn refuse to adopt and acquiesce to in regard to the meta-text. As fans thus never assume a simplistic one-dimensional author role, Author's Notes are consequently also essential in negotiating contradictions in the fannish understanding of the author and help fans to conceptualize a specifically fannish author role that embraces these ambiguities. Habitual in large sections of fanfiction, A/Ns therefore do not gloss over but overtly acknowledge and navigate the tension between empowerment —as fanwriters—and disempowerment—of their (producer) audience—, transforming these very conflicts into statements of authority.

Giving voice to different interpretations of the author, Author's Notes, I argue, essentially contribute to defining fandom and thereby serve as a major factor of fanfiction's democratic revolution of existing power structures within the media landscape: More than any other kind of fan-text, A/Ns allow the fans to dominate discourse by expressly foregrounding their voice and silencing the original authors. Despite their sometimes conventional and generic nature, Author's Notes in fact feature

complex statements of fannish agency and testify to the beliefs and the value system of the interpretive community[69] they originate from, evidencing in their differences in content, phrasing, and diction the fans' specific stances on issues of participation and representation. With their focus oscillating between the individual fanwriter, the fanfiction story, the fannish audience, and the creators of the meta-text, their comments make obvious how these fanauthors do not give in to often prevalent constructions of the fan as the weak and vulnerable Other but instead reconceptualize themselves as powerful members of a vast and multi-voiced community that insists on its agency.

Empowerment and the transfer of power thus constitute the main functions of Author's Notes, since the different models of authorship as expressed in the different subcategories ultimately serve to ascertain fannish authority and control over the meta-text's complete archive and to assure fannish participation in the production of text. Accordingly, these paratextual comments fulfill more fundamental purposes than those addressed in some studies by R. Black (cf. *Adolescents*; "Convergence"; "Digital Design"; "Language") or in passing mentioned by Susan Ashley Wright, who respectively identify their principal role to lie in the interaction of non-native speakers of English with their audience or in the construction of a dichotomy between younger/less experienced and older/more experienced writers.[70] In contrast to these analyses, I argue that Author's Notes are elemental in defining and determining fanauthors' individual and collective self-understanding as fans and as authors: They express how fans are no longer

[69] "[I]nterpretive communities," Stanley Fish writes in his influential definition in *Is There a Text in This Class*, "rather than either the text or the readers, […] produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" (14).

Lindlof, Coyle, and Grodin elaborate on that concept, explaining that membership in an interpretative community, which consists of a "collectivity of readers who share certain strategies for textual interpretation," leads to a certain reading socialization as the "interpretive community establishes conventions, mostly tacit and subject to negotiation, concerning how people recognize, create, experience, and talk about texts" (221).

[70] R. Black shows, for instance, how Nanako, a non-native speaker of English, uses her Author's Notes to ask her readers to "please ignore my grammar mistakes and spelling errors" and to "direc[t] their focus to other aspects of composition such as content and meaning value" (*Adolescents* 85). Via A/Ns—but also via reviews and her stories—, Nanako thus establishes an interaction with her audience that is based on appreciation of her Chinese background instead of being characterized by her not speaking English as a native language.

Wright draws on Author's Notes, reviews, profile pages, etc. to reveal how "'expert' writers, who are often older writers, create a centripetal standard concerning style, grammar, and canon knowledge through advice and feedback to newer and/or younger writers in the fandom" (109).

disenfranchised but acquire their full share of power in a "more truly democratic and interactive field of cultural production" (Mullens 7).

Framing the story text and functioning as a "*threshold*" to connect "text and off-text" (Genette 2), Author's Notes constitute a highly prominent part of the story's header, which contains numerous pieces of information about the story that helps both archivists and audience to categorize it. While each fan-text is accompanied by paratexts of various kinds, which reflect—but in their rich variety also surpass—Genette's identification of paratextual categories in his influential *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, A/Ns represent a particularly frequent and much-used device: While some fans choose to not insert any Author's Notes, my research covering roughly 2,000 stories in the fandoms of *Supernatural*, *Twilight*, and *Star Wars* suggests that, at *FanFiction.Net*, about seven in ten stories have A/Ns, which corresponds to fannish statements that "[a]lmost every story will have one" (ilovetvalot; saarraahhxxx). As my sample stems from large and active fandoms, it can be inferred that fanfiction most likely has hundreds of thousands or rather millions of Author's Notes, all the while it needs to be acknowledged that universally valid numbers or statistics for the distribution of A/Ns are not available due to the genre's highly dynamic, fluid, and community-oriented nature: Depending on fandom, archive, or the time in which a story was published, conventions like the use of specific paratextual categories vary to a very high degree.[71] Although it is thus impossible to arrive at a reliable estimation of the number of Author's Notes in all of fanfiction or even in different communities or fandoms, they nevertheless constitute a major presence in fannish writing—they are used "a lot" (hxchick).

Moreover, Author's Notes are prominently highlighted by being distinctly delineated from the story text or other paratextual forms by the preceding label *A/N* or *Author's Notes* (in all spelling variants fandom uses), and so become immediately obvious to the readers upon accessing a story—in particular because most A/Ns precede the story

[71] *FanFiction.Net*, for example, generally appears to have a lower percentage of Author's Notes than the fanfiction hosted at *LiveJournal*, which enables individual fans to post their texts to their own blogs—or, as Lindemann calls them, "diaries" (356)—, making for a much more visible presence of the writer and a much more intimate relationship with the audience as opposed to *FanFiction.Net*'s system of prioritizing fandoms instead of specific authors. Although each writer has a profile page of their own on *FF.Net*, the site's visitors are by default directed to the individual fandoms, whereas they need to specifically search for a certain writer's name to be able to access all of their stories.

For a discussion of the differences in respect to the attention the individual fanauthor receives at both *FanFiction.Net* and *LiveJournal*, cf. Booth 33-54; Stein, "Dratted Thing" 250-53; Busse and Hellekson, "Introduction" 14-15; Busker; Lindemann.

so that they provide a marked threshold to be crossed. While these introductory comments constitute the lion's share of all Author's Notes and are generally longer, more diverse in topics, and more elaborate than other kinds, A/Ns also frequently appear at the end of either a chapter or a story, but there tend to be more restricted in function: Apart from announcing further chapters, Author's Notes in this position very often overtly prompt interaction with the story's audience such as chattgirl4's injunction that "[i]f there's something that you'd like to happen in the story, or an improvement to be made, include it in your review and I'll work on it. Tell me what you think!"[72]

However situated at the beginning or the end of stories, Author's Notes are often "prolific" (BonesBird, "The Art" 25 July 2010) to give the authors a chance to interact with their readers in a way other categories of paratext or the stories themselves do not allow or provide room for. While most paratextual forms in fanfiction such as warnings or disclaimers are fairly restricted in content, Author's Notes furnish the readers with maximal liberty to express themselves and thus cover a basically infinite range of topics that extends from announcing the experience of the respective fan (rachael.meow) to the name of their "very first cat" (Disasterrific Kaz): Making use of the category's inherent multi-functionality and variability, fanauthors are here free to address "whatever […] the author wants to talk to their readers about" (Moonbeam) and A/Ns can be used to "provide [any kind of] additional information about a fanwork" ("Author's Note").

Indispensable to the genre, this liberty of Author's Notes nevertheless also creates tensions, leading to conflicts that have fans advance manifold opinions in regard to the position, length, general appropriateness, and other issues pertaining to Author's Notes. Indicative of the discussions within fandom in general, *FanFiction.Net,* for example, dedicates a specific forum entitled "Annoying Author's Notes" to debates and complaints about A/Ns: In addition to objecting to encountering their rare form in the "middle" of a story, since that "is like hitting a brick wall in the middle of no where," DamnBlackHeart here voices the frustration she feels "when a chapter is a author's note," because in

[72] Very rarely are Author's Notes inserted into the story proper where fans may use these interjacent remarks to clarify a character trait or to explain a plot element (cf., for example, entirely-our-own). Although these can be interpreted as a fannish way to interweave their author persona with their writing to visualize their power of appropriation similar to Mary Sue stories (cf. chapter 3.4), they are among the most disputed forms of paratext in fandom, with fanauthors considering the practice frustrating and irritating: "They just annoy me," complains DamnBlackHeart, "because when I'm all into the story and come across one of those my mood dies. I can't enjoy or be sucked into a story when an author interrupts a story like that. It's completely unnecessary."

expectation of the story to be continued she gets "all disappointed,"[73] and criticizes "those author's notes that are longer than the story" as she considers this "a little insulting." In a similar vein, many writers use this forum to argue about a variety of issues such as how A/Ns should have "really productive content" instead of "schizophrenic chats" (Pokethat), or what exactly needs to be in-/excluded, and what is their appropriate length. Fans, for example, remain divided over whether A/Ns should be "short and to the point" (AhmoseInarus) or "longwinded" (BonesBird, "The Art" 26 July 2010), and while admonitions to authors to neither use Author's Notes to "make [them] bloat the word count on your stories" (Pokethat) nor to explain something the fandom is familiar with (cf. Venath) are far less prominent than criticizing the length of comments or their interruption of the flow of a story, these objections nevertheless prove the constant negotiation paratext is subjected to in fandom.

Despite these dissenting voices, fans all the same acknowledge the significance Author's Notes have gained in the communication and mutual understanding between a story's author and its audience as they are an "excellent way to inform the readers about what they're about to read" (Venath) and may facilitate the reception of the story by including, for instance explanations, translations, or a reference as to where the story is situated in the textual archive. Moreover, fanauthors also give advice on questions on "[h]ow do you write an authors note" (Karimina6), pointing out that they should be used to "give general thank yous, warnings, or other information that I think is pertinent to the reader" (Kanarah J), and that they are best "placed either at the very beginning or end of a story and not too long" (Venath). Furthermore, Author's Notes are meant to establish a relationship between community members on a very "personal level" (Kanarah J) that grants fanfiction an advantage to professional publishing, where the creator of a text and its audience are removed from each other by several intermediate layers of agents, editors, bookstores, or networks. To fans, therefore, Author's Notes prove on yet another level that fanfiction, which as a genre is defined by the immediate conflation of writer and reader, removes the physical and conceptual barriers between these two instances: Long-time members of fandom admit how "extremely thankful" they are for A/Ns, not only because they contain factual content that is important for reading a story but above all because they

[73] Although *FF.Net*'s administrative staff had reacted to criticism like hers by November 2008 at the latest (the site's content guidelines can only be accessed in the latest edition available; the most recent update stems from 20 Nov. 2008) and implemented a prohibition of posting A/Ns as separate story chapters, DamnBlackHeart's complaint from July 2010 avidly proves the ongoing existence of the practice.

"like remembering that there are people producing these stories that we're reading" (Kanarah J); as such, A/Ns represent "a little chance to know more about the person […]. It's good to learn about your fellow authors that way" (BonesBird, "The Art" 25 July 2010). Time and again, fans thus express the significant value they see in their being part of a cohesive structure, which is neither anonymous and faceless nor impersonal and uncommunicative but stresses the interaction between its writers and readers. Despite the prominent usage of pseudonyms within the genre,[74] A/Ns are appreciated as an opportunity to establish a personal connection, and fans "love" (LoveforPenandDerek) and are even "totally addicted" (Moon Raven2) to them.

Brief excerpts from some of many discussions about Author's Notes, these fans' views illustrate the intense battles waged about this paratextual form, attesting to the significance it has acquired in fannish contexts. Despite—or precisely because—being contested in so many regards, they nevertheless affirm Genette's statement on paratextual power as the specific qualities of Author's Notes have them constitute a prime example of his initial statement of the value and impact of paratext: Paratext, he writes in his extensive 1987/1997 study, "surround[s]" the text "and extend[s] it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (1). According to his definition, it is therefore paratext that makes the text available in the first place, it "enables a text […] to be offered

[74] Almost all members of the fanfiction community write and read under a pseudonym, which is not only a very common occurrence in Internet communication despite recent debates about attempts of social networks like *Facebook* or *Google+* to stipulate the use of real names for their members but also does not automatically lead to anonymity: Since most fanauthors inhabit the very same pseudonym for years, they thus establish a stable and familiar identity within the community that is based on their stories, their interaction with their reviewers, their preferences in terms of texts, characters, approaches to writing, etc. Busse likens this practice to examples from pre-Internet cultures, such as Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain: "Pseudonyms," she says, "in fact, tend to function as authorial identifiers in the same way names do" ("Return" 59).

Moreover, Busse sees pseudonyms as a possible instance of empowerment as the practice gives writers the chance to conceal specific markers of their identity that might be construed as negative (be those sex, age, ethnicity, etc.) and foreground others that demonstrate characteristics perceived as positive ("Return" 59-60). In this way, fans, for example, highlight their membership to a specific community by choosing a name that signifies favorite fandoms or characters such as Medusa Sparrow-Winchester, who immediately underlines her fannish identity as a writer in the fandoms of *Pirates of the Carribbean* and *Supernatural*, whose protagonists are, respectively, the characters of Jack Sparrow and the Winchester brothers. "If authorship is in fact about authority and control, then choosing to not reveal information may be as important as revealing it," writes Busse ("Return" 60) in an echo of Genette, who stipulates the enormous power of pseudonyms in the creation of an author and their work: "Clearly, using a pseudonym is already a poetic activity, and the pseudonym is already somewhat like a work. If you can change your name, you can write" (54).

[…] to its readers, and more generally, to the public" (1). A text cannot *be* without the surrounding paratext since only the latter provides the readers with the possibility to enter the text, to cross into the fictional world of the story realm. Liminality[75] serves as an essential concept in Genette's writings, which emphasize how paratext is "[m]ore than a boundary or sealed border" (1) that would prevent access and strictly seal the text off from the world; instead, he defines paratext as a "*threshold*," or, as a

> "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" […] between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge […] Indeed, this fringe […] constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*. (2)

Characterizing paratexts as the texts that "*make* [the text] *present*" and whose significance rests on the fact that they embody liminality in functioning as spaces of "transition" and "*transaction*," Genette's findings, I argue, cover central qualities of fannish paratext—and, in particular, of Author's Notes: Within the fanfiction community, paratext functions in a decidedly similar way, since it not only provides an "'undefined zone'" for fanwriters to articulate and negotiate issues they consider worthy of discussion but, foremost, enables the existence of the stories in the first place. Framed as specifically fannish, paratextual forms such as A/Ns, disclaimers, or pairings thus position the fanwriters firmly within their community, defining their self-identification as fans and their stories as fanfiction: Comments made in Author's Notes as to the distinct "fanfic" (Raginixed) quality of their writing and that they are "well versed in the Star Wars universe" (wingzero-01-custom) establish the stories *as* stories and the fans *as* fanauthors—they "*present*" them as fannish. By highlighting both the fannish character of the stories and the voices of the fans, A/Ns are thus instrumental in "ensur[ing] the text's presence in the world" (Genette 1).

Employing Author's Notes to self-reflexively interrogate their own relation to their own story, the meta-text, or its producers by pointing toward the essential fanfiction-ness

[75] The term *liminality*, according to Merriam Webster, derives from the Latin *limin-*/*limen*, which literally translates as 'threshold' ("Liminal"). The concept was originally conceived in anthropology, where it was used to refer to an intermediate state in rituals (cf., for example, Victor Turner's influential essay "Betwixt and Between" of 1964) but later taken up by various disciplines to convey a sense of indeterminacy in transitional periods, stages, epochs, etc.

of their writing, fanauthors consequently instrumentalize the aforementioned liminality of paratexts—they highlight how A/Ns are neither story text nor "off-text" (Genette 2) but are equally situated in both worlds[76]: As such, the liminal "fringe" (Genette 2) becomes a space of an encounter, where rather affirmational acknowledgments like "I love that [particular *Star Wars*] scene and I've always wondered what Anakin was thinking […] so I made up my own script about it" (iolaaa) exist side by side with highly transformational approaches that declare *Twilight* a "sappy, half baked, over the top, romance novel" (happyhouseelf) that needs to be fundamentally "reimagin[ed]" to "create something that made more sense to me than the original book did" (littlebabydaisy).

Clearly, examples like these or Hatteress's A/Ns illustrate how fans use the liminality of Author's Notes for a purpose fundamental to fanfiction writing as a genre. Notwithstanding the manifold differences between A/Ns in length, detail, content, framing, etc., each and everyone of them, I claim, foremost functions as a space of "*transaction*" (Genette 2) which enables the stories' transfer from the producers of the meta-text to the fanfiction community. Regardless which specific type an Author's Note may belong to and which fannish model of authorship it may express, the fanauthors' explicit referral to the processes, motivations, and approaches to fanfiction writing in their A/Ns discloses how they reconstruct themselves from the passive Other into agents with a claim to participation in the meta-text—in short, how power is transferred from the producers to themselves as fans: The way they frame their activities in their A/Ns evidences the degree to which fans take for granted that they have the authority to intervene in the meta-text, contribute to its fictional archive, and participate in its production, while their words simultaneously tend to indicate the struggle for their rights they need to engage in constantly. In fannish definition, the fictional universe does no longer belong to Stephenie Meyer, Eric Kripke, George Lucas, or any other of the

[76] This double position, or threshold, overtly shows in Author's Notes such as Fate Juliet Gaisras's, where she has herself talk to the fictional character of Bella from the *Twilight* series to establish her own authorial power as opposed to the meta-text's authority that is emphatically "shut up":

> Me: […] I'm here to reveal the *true* story of Twilight to you.
> Bella: What are you talking about? They already know the *true* story!
> Me: No they don't. Now shut up you stupid emo wanna-be.
> Bella: -.-

This mesh of a fanauthorial persona and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* protagonist emphasizes the liminal character of Author's Notes, blurring the distinction between "text and off-text" (Genette 2). The fanauthor thus offers to the readers the chance to gradually immerse themselves in the story, without setting a hard and fixed boundary between the fictional world and, in fannish terms, real life.

allegedly original authors, but to the fans themselves—a belief which fanauthors conceptualize in their Author's Notes as an overt transmission of power: Asserting that "Meyer got it wrong," TributeTara, for instance, argues that "my version is the right way" since "isn't that what fanfiction is for?"

Each Author's Note thus serves as a manifestation of fannish authority as it mirrors the transfer of the meta-text into the hands of its fanfiction-producing audience. My research has shown that the belief in the "death of the Author" (Barthes, *Image* 148) is inherent in all of these comments, enabling fans to disavow the producers of any authorial rights. Here, they have the space to overtly convey their redefinition of the static and closed "*readerly*" meta-texts into open and fluid "*writerly*" texts that revoke the "pitiless divorce […] between the producer of the text and its user" (Barthes, *S/Z* 4)—or rather, their complete reconceptualization of the meta-text into a "producerly" text, which expressly "invite[s] fan productivity" (Fiske 42). Explicitly demonstrating this dismissal of the original author in the Author's Notes to her *Twilight* story "Bella With A Secret," fsquiggles, for instance, easily transfers the meta-text into the possession of herself and her community to underline the fans' agency: "So someone on my blog asked me to write Twilight how I thought the plot and stuff should have been written. So hereee goes." Without even referencing Stephenie Meyer, she affirms her power over a multi-million dollar franchise in emphasizing how it "should" have been written according to the fans. Her wording has her story supersede the meta-text, whose alleged power she relocates to her own production that instead provides the 'correct' version of the text. Moreover, her A/Ns announce her story as a response to "someone on [her] blog" in order to simultaneously situate her as a member of a community of fans which relegates *Twilight* to a kind of reference book instead of maintaining its position as the only valid text. Stripping the novels and their author of any authority while empowering the fans, fsquiggles engages in a large scale shift of agency that provides an illustrative example of the premise at heart of fanfiction—namely that a community of readers assumes power over previously published texts, disavowing their status and replacing them by their own "plot and stuff."

While fsquiggles does not even mention the producers, they nevertheless often play an important role in the transactional space of the Author's Notes, highlighting the struggle for power and authority fandom engages in as fans cast them explicitly in the light of antagonists or "external enemies" (Shirky, "Group"; Zubernis and Larsen,

Fandom 121). "There's what Kripke wrote, there's what the boys [on the show] say, then there's what I hear," PissedOffEskimo, for instance, writes in the A/Ns for her story "Funnies," which takes as its cue lines from various *Supernatural* episodes to only reframe them completely in new contexts. Neither executive producer Eric Kripke nor the actors Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki (or the characters they embody, Dean and Sam Winchester) remain in an authorial subject position but the fans' interpretation substitutes them in an actively enacted, visualized, and verbalized transaction of power: Both what is written in the script and what is made of these lines on the screen does not count, which reveals the two main strategies fanfiction engages in, i.e. dismissing the voice of the traditional media outlet and creating the fans' voice instead. Transferring interpretational sovereignty from the meta-text to herself as a fanauthor, PissedOffEskimo's Author's Notes thus legitimize her own position and consolidate the fans' claims. Fanfiction, as all stories attest to, is not about Meyer, Kripke, or the "boys," but instead any type of A/Ns either explicitly or implicitly dismisses these instances of traditional power and agency only to substitute them by the fanauthors.

Providing the space for encoding and demonstrating fanfiction's most fundamental claims, Author's Notes therefore play a pivotal role in the fans' common purpose of achieving the "transition" and "*transaction*" (Genette 2) of agency. It is in A/Ns where the democratic archive finds its verbal expression, illustrating the fluidity of text, the fannish participatory culture, and the instability of hierarchical power relations. Their focus on 'de-authorizing' the meta-text powerfully disclaims Genette's absolutist statement that paratext "is always subordinate to 'its' text" (12) as A/Ns are instrumental in defining the genre in its entirety: Author's Notes give fanauthors the chance to overtly deconstruct the divine "Author-God" of the meta-text and to simultaneously assume power of their own. In this act of opening up the meta-text for fannish appropriation, fans negotiate central questions as to, Who *possesses* power? Who has power *over* what? Who has the power *to do* what? In consequence, A/Ns are far from "subordinate" but their transfer of authority rather affirms the essential significance of paratext in 'making the text present,' in framing and constituting it for its readers. Situated in the intermediate position between both "text and off-text" (Genette 2)—between both the world of fanfiction and the realm of the meta-textual producers—, the presence of A/Ns as spaces of transaction "highlights the power of the fan fiction writer" (Hoge) and supports the reconstruction of their role as equal participants in a more democratic media landscape. My research reveals that fans are not

merely satisfied with denying the producers their hitherto largely unchallenged rights and declaring the meta-text "trite, and self-important, and anti-climactic" (estrafalaria103, "Loon Lament") but that they distinctly employ paratext to establish themselves as powerful authors in their own right. Underlining what Jonathan Gray writes in reference to contemporary media paratexts such as movie trailers, audio commentaries, or other 'bonus materials' that show how questions of "textual meaning, power, and value often begin with the paratexts," fanauthors construe A/Ns as "constitutive parts" ("When Is" 102; also cf. J. Gray, *Show*; Mittell) of the text and use them to establish their own agency—they, as Lola Jeery asserts, use them to do "what a true author would do": It is in their Author's Notes that fanauthors become authors and insist on their position as producers, as active shapers of culture.

Apart from their general purpose of transferring agency to the fans in a democratic redistribution of power, A/Ns, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, also create a space where many different constructions of the author role engage in a dialogue—where fans have the opportunity to liberate their fanfiction from the original producer's voice, to both create their own voice and make it heard, and to interact with their audience. In fulfilling these all-important—'powerful'—purposes in the overall relationship between fans and the producers, Author's Notes accordingly widely surpass and extend Genette's idea of what the "chief function" of paratext constitutes: "[*T*]*o ensure that the text is read properly*" (197) is far too restrictive a notion and stems from an overcome belief in the author as the "personification of singular origin" (Hartley 24) and the "author-as-hero" (Johnson and Gray 2) that has the exclusive power to dominate a text and its readers. In light of fannish activities, however, paratext can no longer be solely read as an author's attempt to influence the readers' reception of the text but it becomes significant in enabling the writers—and, in extension, their community—to determine their position in that increasingly symmetrical dynamics of fannish and meta-textual producers. Genette's insistence on limiting the power of the original preface to the single task of "*get*[*ting*] *the book read properly*" (197) neglects the fanwriters' usage of Author's Notes for much wider and more varied purposes that culminate in claiming a measure of agency Genette seems to disavow for authors: Going far beyond "monitory" prefaces which instruct the reader on "this is *why* and this is *how* you should read this book" (Genette 197), fans focus in their A/Ns on three different models of authorship, using and

complexly intertwining them to ascend to a position of power—their "bold voices" (Hoge) provide them with multi-dimensional agency.

As the remainder of this chapter shows, fannish authors, instead of merely drawing authority from the close constraints of Genette's proposed author role, i.e. the author that seeks to create "an influence on the public […] at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (2), employ all shades of a largely Barthesian idea of the dead author that "utterly transforms the modern text" (*Image* 145), a Romantic "apotheosis of authorship" (Jaszi and Woodmansee 3), and the "collaborative, fused, remixed authorship" (Johnson and Gray 5) of the digital Web 2.0 era in which "whole populations" (Hartley 23) become authors. Utilizing these approaches for their purposes, fanauthors, I argue in the following, intricately apply them to construct their power in manifold ways, creating and articulating agency in their own democratic archive. Distinctly, it is therefore not just one aspect of one author role fans exploit to determine their status; instead, they interpret it in all its nuances and varieties to establish themselves in a position of power: Transcending the idea of the author as a "fully intentional, fully sentient source of the literary text, as authority for and limitation on the 'proliferating' meanings of the text" (Bennett 55; also cf. Hoffmann and Langer 136), who determines in his paratext how a text is going to be read, fans insist on their agency via assuming multiple author roles. Their Author's Notes open up a field of discussion about the figure of the author in fanfiction writing, demonstrating how resourceful fanwriters are in establishing their status as participants in and producers of text. As fannish paratext avidly displays, fans are very much aware of the multiple stances a writer can assume in calling himself an *author*—and also of what sources of power these authors can use to consolidate their status.

Extensively researching *Supernatural*, *Star Wars*, and *Twilight* Author's Notes has therefore yielded elaborate examples of fannish testimony to their agency, which I read in respect to the ways fanwriters position themselves *as* authors. Analyzing their content in detail, I was able to differentiate several subtypes of A/Ns that each expresses a distinct authorial stance in reference to one of the abovementioned three larger models of authorship in Western cultural history. Expanding previous research that discussed only very limited purposes of A/Ns in the interaction of different fannish subgroups (cf. the work by R. Black; Wright), I consequently claim on the basis of this chapter that A/Ns ultimately serve a key function in fanfiction as they consolidate the fanauthors' authority

and control over the fannish archive inclusive of the meta-text and accordingly signify the larger democratizing revolutions in our contemporary media landscape. To prove my contention, I significantly extended the objects of study from R. Black's three fanauthors from one fandom (cf. *Adolescents* 21, 52-65) to a survey of several hundred A/Ns whose contents convey the respective writer's stance towards the meta-text, fanfiction writing, etc., or suggest how they conceptualize the distribution of power between the producers and themselves. Secondly, I examined these pre-selected Author's Notes for recurrent themes to see if the fans employ identifiable patterns in declaring their agency that would testify to the entire community's interpretive stance(s). In this process, it quickly became evident that the writers draw on established fandom narratives that are both vital and prolific within the communities so as to require no explanation by the writers and/or no additional background knowledge of the readers such as familiarity with Barthes's writings. In what results to be of the significant conclusions drawn from this study, these patterns verbalized in distinct subtypes of Author's Notes prove to be not at all restricted to one fandom but, despite the noticeable distinctions in writer identities, discourse, etc.,[77] instead transcend the boundaries of individual fandoms to represent a major characteristic of fanfiction writing in general.

As my study deliberately departs from the common practice in fan studies to confine research to one single fandom, I therefore argue that fanfiction-*wide* and across fandoms Author's Notes acquire essential importance in negotiations of agency and authority by functioning as a liminal space that permits and facilitates a transaction of power. Building on above insights into the character of A/Ns, i.e. their liminal position, their purpose in conveying fannish agency in a transaction of power, and their central significance in fanfiction, my study shows how Author's Notes allow a unique insight into the fans' multi-dimensional use of author constructions in their identity formation that belies Genette's belief in the singular function of paratexts in determining a 'proper' reading of texts (2, 197). In the following, this chapter accordingly demonstrates and discusses the ways fanauthors employ different models of authorship for their own empowerment, utilizing their Author's Notes to establish a new position that includes

[77] Although impossible to substantiate with exact statistics, my research suggests that, for example, fans active in the *Twilight* fandom tend to be younger than in *Supernatural*; similarly, *Star Wars* fanauthors seem to be more likely male than in other fandoms, although still maintaining fanfiction's general significant female surplus. While the phrasing of Author's Notes appears to differ in discourse according to such characteristics as a writer's age, experience, etc., at heart they nevertheless contain the very same basic statements about fannish agency, community, and a disavowal of the meta-text.

aspects of the dead author, the 'resurrected/undead' author, and a community-oriented model of collaborative writing—in short, that establish the fanauthor.

3.2.1 The "Death of the Author" in the Archive of Fannish Production

Fanfiction, according to common fannish lore, was born in 1967 with its first stories published in *Spockanalia*, the first *Star Trek: The Original Series* fanzine, to set off the empowerment of the fans and a revolution of the media landscape; the author, according to Roland Barthes, died in the same pivotal year of 1967 to set off the empowerment of the reader and a revolution of the humanities. Far from merely coinciding, these two events can be read as inherently connected: The genre of fanfiction with its reconceptualization of the formerly passive audience virtually embodies Barthes's famous proclamation that "to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (*Image* 148). Deconstructing the meta-text and its author, the fannish archive with its multiple texts and voices exemplifies this future (cf. Derrida 36) in which the readers ascend to a position of power, since it is they and their productive activities which verify that, first, "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (*Image* 142), and, secondly, that a "text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)" but instead "a multi-dimensional space" (*Image* 146). Displaying the fans' right to appropriate the meta-text, participate in the production of meaning, and produce their own interpretations, fannish practices therefore signify the importance which Barthes's murderous act and its subsequent transformations of previous supposed truisms about author, text, and reader assume in the genre.

Postulating that the "origin of the text is not a unified authorial consciousness but a plurality of voices, of other words, other utterances and other texts" (Allen 72), Barthes saved the text from remaining/becoming sacrosanct and eliminated what John Hartley calls "[m]ethodological individualism," i.e. the "analytical system based on being able to identify the 'author' of actions and meanings" (39). Deconstructing the enormously influential image of the god-like author who had been the "centering figure for notions of textual creation" (J. Gray, "When Is" 88) signified the initiation moment for a

democratization of the humanities[78] that values the participation of the reader in the production of meaning, highlighting that authorship construed as a singular act of creation, fixed in time and space, has today frequently "dwindle[d] to the point of meaninglessness" (Hartley 30). While literary criticism of the twentieth century was characterized by a progressive weakening of the relevance of the figure of the author,[79] poignantly verbalized already in William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy" that declared the "design or intention of the author [a]s neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (3), it was mainly Barthes and, briefly later, Michel Foucault who established the vision of an author-less discourse—of a possible "post-author world" (J. Gray, "When Is" 88). Just as Barthes's act of declaring the author dead, Foucault's proclaiming him a mere "ideological product" that amounts to nothing more than a "functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" leads to his proposition that "we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author" ("What Is" 159), i.e. the idea of the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146) as dominant in pre-postmodernism and pre-poststructuralism.

Then a radical idea, Barthes's and Foucault's assessment that the author is "anything but unquestionable or natural" (Allen 71) has been the subject of intense scholarly debate since the late 1960s, revolving around the question whether any truth can be found in the central conclusions they posit; namely, whether the author really died—i.e. whether there really is nobody speaking in a text—, and whether the indifference of the "anonymity of a murmur" (Foucault, "What Is" 160) has superseded the alleged significance of a proper, identifiable name as an "indicato[r] of truth" (Barthes, *S/Z* 191)—

[78] As indicated prior (and discussed in later chapters, above all in 3.2.2), this deconstruction of the author has largely taken place in the humanities but has not yet progressed into other fields of scholarship or the media industry, which is still "keen to offer us an author" (J. Gray, *Show* 99).

[79] According to Busse, for example, "most twentieth century literary critical approaches—from Russian formalism and new criticism to poststructuralism and deconstruction to reception aesthetics and cultural studies—focused on texts and readers, on contexts of production and reception, but rarely on the identity of the author, on his intended meaning or purpose in writing" ("Return" 52). Theorizing the author in its multiple facets, Torsten Hoffmann and Daniela Langer cite four decisive steps that disempowered the author during the last century, i.e. Wimsatt and Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy," the differentiation between author and narrator, the construct of the implied author, and the eventual culmination of these ideas in Barthes's and Foucault's respective essays (131-32). In addition, the author also "dwindles in importance" in the theory of intertextuality where "his role is reduced to providing the site or space for the interplay of texts" (Pfister, "How" 212).

i.e. whether Foucault's question of, "What difference does it make who is speaking?" ("What Is" 160) can be answered in the positive or in the negative. As Foucault rightly stated in his response to Barthes's influential essay, it is "not enough […] to repeat the empty affirmation that that author has disappeared. […] Instead," he proclaims, "we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance […] and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" ("What Is" 145).

In subsequent years, numerous suggestions have accordingly been made to "locate the space left empty"[80] but, as Jonathan Gray contends in a 2013 essay, "we have not yet worked out what to do when the author dies" ("When Is" 88). Based on my discussion of fannish empowerment and their democratizing strategies in this thesis, I claim, however, that his absolutist statement needs to be modified—or maybe even largely nullified—in the face of fanfiction and its fanauthors: They are the ones who realize Barthes's "goal […] to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4); their activities reconstruct the text as both "productive" (*S/Z* 5) and fluid because for them it "cannot stop (for example on a library shelf)" (*Image* 157). Barthes's thinking that "every text is eternally written *here and now*" (*Image* 145) and his desanctification of the author as "that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism" (*S/Z* 211) acquire fundamental significance in fanfiction, since the fannish archive serves as exemplary proof of how "writing is the destruction of every [original] voice, of every point of origin" (*Image* 142). The archontic nature of fanfiction specifically illustrates the ways literary production and criticism function without being "tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions" and how the "*explanation* of a work" needs *not* be "sought in the man or woman who produced it" (*Image* 143).

[80] Fan studies, for example, has located two constructions the creators of the meta-text employ in their endeavors to fill the "space left empty," both of which seek to utilize the fannish belief in the death of the author to re-establish their own authority *as* authors. In what Suzanne Scott has termed the "fanboy auteur," directors like *300*'s Zack Snyder or *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*'s producer Joss Whedon position themselves foremost as "faithful fanboy[s]" ("Dawn" 440) and utilize their "fan credentials, which are narrativized and (self) promoted as an integral part" ("Steering" 44) of their identity, to affirm their power over fans; they frame themselves as part of fandom instead of the 'establishment,' all the while seeking to assert their own authority via that very establishment ("Dawn" 449; "Steering" 45).

In a similar fashion, J. Gray detects the "undead author" (*Show* 112) in attempts of the producers to "adop[t] part of the reader role" (*Show* 113) themselves. Also naming Joss Whedon as an example, Gray explains how these authors "have realized the importance of engaging with their fan bases"; they intend to create the impression of being eager to "kill [themselves] as author" despite returning in paratexts such as audio commentaries or interviews as "signifiers of value, as messages to and from the network and […] as paratextual entities that frame both value and textual meaning" (*Show* 113).

Fanfiction, since fans wrote its very first stories due to a powerful desire of having the "freedom to choose" (Russ 89) their own explanations, has always followed Barthesian and Foucauldian principles in devaluing and deconstructing the author of the meta-text. As Mu Wing, a collective pseudonym that represents a group of five writers and translates to 'Anonymous,' claim(s) in an interview, "we believe that the author is overrated. […] Authors have no supernatural powers. Quite a few of them don't even have anything to say." Fluid and not to be put on a "library shelf" (Barthes, *Image* 157), fannish writing disrupts the alleged stability of the meta-text and forcefully demonstrates the redistribution of the creative agency of the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146) to the fans: "The *once* godlike power, to be 'the person who originates or gives existence to anything,' has *democratized*, to become everyone's responsibility" (Hartley 43; my emphasis).

Positioning former consumers as producers, fanfiction thus symbolizes not only the poststructuralist idea of the "birth of the reader […] at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes, *Image* 148) but simultaneously reconstructs previous power relations as Jenkins so expressly proclaimed already in 1992: "Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations" (*Textual Poachers* 18). Each story anew declares the author dead, substantiates the fans' agency, and confirms the inherent relevance of Barthes's ideas to the genre. Fans simply could not write without a firm belief in the 'authorless' text, in the text as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, *Image* 146). They remove the former instance of 'author-ity,' open up the text to make it "plural" (Barthes, *Image* 159), and redefine it as an archive to negate any producer's claims of their own singular interpretational sovereignty. "[F]ans," write Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse in an obvious echo of Derecho's theory of fanfiction as archontic literature,

> emphasize and foreground the intertextuality of their creative work. Fan authors and artists embrace repetition as a central mode of creative production. [...] In fact, fan authors and artists can be understood as part of a larger aesthetic tradition that celebrates reproduction […] and, consequently, as part of a threat to both the concepts of original artistic creation and the idea of aesthetic ownership. (193)

Emphasizing "repetition" in contrast to the singularity of the "original artistic creation" so highly valued by the producers of the meta-text, the fannish archive

"celebrates" its independence from previous constructions of authorship, authority, and text, allowing its participants to expand, alter, or transform the meta-text's fictional universe to negate any non-fandom claims of "aesthetic ownership." Based on the absence of Derridean archons, fanfiction thus eliminates the idea of the author as a "guardian" (2) of the text and eradicates any "political power" (2) this position would imply—only to transfer this very power to its own participants: Highly visible and prominent obituaries, the stories posted all over the Internet illustrate how for fanauthors the meta-text's author is truly dead.[81]

With the death of the author so significant for fanfiction, fans do not stop at writing stories that symbolize the reader's birth as their inherent characteristic, but instead proclaim their "destruction of […] every point of origin" (Barthes, *Image* 142) even more forcefully: It is in their Author's Notes, in this liminal space, that fanauthors vocalize most compellingly their belief in the absence of the author—in their own "post-author world" (J. Gray, "When Is" 88)—and their fundamental distrust of the "notion of literature as something stable and finished" (LaChev 85); it is here where they voice their "right to disregard episodes" (Tidia), where they assert their "variations and liberties taken" (Twilight Mix N' Match Contest), and where they proclaim to "rectify […] everything in the show" since "that's what fanfiction is for" (Desertfyre). Affirming the activities of the fanwriters, Author's Notes serve as a strategy to insist on fannish power and authority, since they enable fanauthors to deconstruct the binary between active producer and passive consumer via dismissing the creators of the meta-text and the meta-text as instances of authority. As such, A/Ns are pervaded by declarations of creating a "more satisfying climax" (Anna Brooks) than the meta-text's or of "rewriting [the meta-text] in a way that I think will be interesting" (ourlastsummr) so that this space of paratextual

[81] While a fundamental principle of the genre in its entirety, it needs to be acknowledged that the author has certainly not died for every fan. Not only does affirmational fandom tend to rely on the presence of an authorial subject who is constructed as "The Only One Who Really Knows" (obsession_inc) and whose alleged purposes function as the guiding principles for fannish practices and interpretations, but due to the immense heterogeneity of fanfiction the original authors and the published text still hold power over some (parts of) fan communities.

In addition to the dialogues between the fans and the meta-text, in which, as I have illustrated, the latter is examined for minute details to support or dismiss specific interpretations, some fans accordingly uphold the author as a figure of power and influence. In a 2006 essay entitled "If the Author is Dead, Who's Updating Her Website?," Angua, for example, argues extensively for J.K. Rowling's authority in interpreting her *Harry Potter* books and demonstrates how Rowling "has refused to be 'dead' and has staked her claim on her own work" even while acknowledging that "the less J.K. Rowling says about her own intentions, the more freedom fans have in their own fan fiction, theories, and other imaginative interactions with the books."

comment becomes the space where fans transfer interpretational sovereignty to themselves.

Mirroring the relevance of the concept for the genre, this death of the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146)—either explicitly stated or implied—is the focus of the near majority of the samples of A/Ns I analyzed, with fans seeking to transfer the humanities' deconstruction of the author to the realm of the media industry in different ways. Accordingly, a first group of Author's Notes overtly forces the author of the meta-text to yield to the empowered audience, who finds fault with the meta-texts, declaring them inadequate, full of mistakes, and, in application of Fiske's concept of "producerly" texts, "insufficient" as they cannot fulfill their "cultural function of circulating meanings and pleasure until they are worked upon and activated by their fans" (42). Moreover, a second group of Author's Notes focuses on the archontic principle of fanfiction to substitute the hierarchical superiority of the meta-text for the equality of texts within the fannish archive, emphasizing how the "drive within an archive that seeks to […] enlarge itself" (Derecho 64) disrupts previous binaries and and relegates the meta-text to just one voice among the many.

While both of these approaches to fanfiction writing terminate the author's "mastery of meaning" (Barthes, *S/Z* 173), it is particularly the first category that quasi annihilates the producers as nearly divine instances that give the meta-text a "single 'theological' meaning" and a "'message'" (Barthes, *Image* 146). Confronted with the allegedly sacrosanct meta-text and its creators, fans point out its quantitative and qualitative inadequacies and rightly ask that if the text is defective, how can it possess authority? How can an instance that produces "MAJOR suckage" (Hatteress) be considered an "Author-God"? Reflecting these questions, fans' Author's Notes prominently display the shortcomings of the meta-text and their own desire for closure in face of a traditionally limited—and therefore incomplete and fragmented—meta-text, focusing on its "unrealistic plot twists" (TranquilGuardian) and professing that they "really hat[e] all the unresolved issues in the show" (DivineDescent). The deficiencies and misconstructions of the meta-text thus become one of the major entryways for fans claiming agency and ascending to a position of power. Far from being confined to admire and love their object of fandom in an affirmational manner, they assert their transformational power—they voice their liberty to be dissatisfied with it, express the

necessity to "correct some things" (Romantic-Gi), and affirm their capacity to produce a "catharsis for that" (gostlcards).

Discontent with the meta-text thus features as one of the main motives for fanfiction writing, with fans elaborating on what made them engage in their activities in the first place. CHAILYN, for instance, introduces her *Supernatural* story "Full Circle" with proclaiming her intense disappointment with the show, a feeling she then transforms to writing a new text of her own: "I know I have about a dozen other stories that I should be working on, and trying to finish, but I'm just so frustrated with this season, and Sam and Dean so far that I just... […] I miss the days of them actually, you know, liking each other." Similarly, FrostedPurpleIrises91 confidently confirms the mistakes of the meta-text to be the main reason for creating fanfiction, dismissing the oft-avowed power of George Lucas/Lucasfilm over their *Star Wars* franchise: The movies, she writes, claim to ascertain "that Grievous does have a family but virtually nothing has been said about them in the canon universe. That always bugged me and so I decided to take matters into my own hands." While representing the source of the fans' negative emotions—which does speak for it to have *some* power—, the meta-text nevertheless spurs the fanauthors to write and therefore aids in its own dismissal. Its insufficiency and shortcomings permit the fans to conceptualize it as a text on a level equal to their own stories, which may, after all, also have "errors and such" (xGolden.Slumbersx). "[C]ertain mistakes […] made while writing" (anhanninen) thus establish a link between the amateur producers of fanfiction and the professional producers, with fans distinctly using the latter's flaws in this type of Author's Notes for awarding themselves with the same status as the meta-textual authors. Pointing out how "Charlie Swan and Sue Clearwater's relationship doesn't really get discussed much by Ms Meyer," *Twilight*-fan grrlinterrupted, for example, stresses the non-divine status of Stephenie Meyer, while she simultaneously asserts her own power by providing a "little ficlet exploring how the Chief and his feisty, strong, beautiful woman might be a few years into their relationship."

Highlighting the absence of a 'master mind' that has the ability to produce flawless fictional universes therefore supports the fans in their endeavor to deconstruct the figure of the author, who dies in the act of disproving his texts as immaculate creations. Fundamentally, fanfiction grounds its existence in the fannish demand of "more of" and "more from" (Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 19, 26-43) that can only be generated by a meta-text that is characterized by presenting 'less of' and 'less from.' Quantity and quality thus

become the major points of fannish disappointment and ensuing interference. No meta-text is seen as perfect, no author as a divine creator who "exceed[s] the writing" (Barthes, *Image* 145); consequentially, fans proclaim to have the right to continue where "stephenie meyer left us all hanging" (emmaroseroberts) and to write the "5th book" (theblackrose88) to her four-volume novel series. Wherever a meta-text features plot elements or character traits that "bugged me," fanauthors seize their chance to enter the fictional universe by declaring it open for transformation, invoking their own power to produce a 'more perfect' archive by adding their own "little way of explaining where it went and why" (Angelustatt).

The defective and inadequate meta-text therefore provides a powerful incentive for writing fanfiction, which can improve on its quality and add to its quantity: Distinguished by the urge to not eliminate the meta-text but instead to introduce stories into its archive to "expand on what might have happened after the cameras stopped rolling in the Phantom Menace universe" (obi's girl), fanfiction deconstructs the notion of the text as it is in order to reconstruct it as fluid—as a text that is "becoming" (J. Gray, "When Is" 89). In the archive, the text is characterized as "plural," as Barthes terms it (*Image* 159), which belies the existence of a "single 'theological' meaning" (Barthes, *Image* 146) and shifts power from an individual to the community of contributors. Based on this desanctification of the "Author-God" and the empowerment of its previous 'disciples,' the archive features as one of the driving principles behind many Author's Notes that comment on fanfiction's desire to "always produce more archive, to enlarge itself" (Derecho 64). Fanauthor luckypixi, for instance, describes her story as a "requested missing scene filling-in from Iryann, who thought there was always something missing from this episode," while Moony3003 writes a "[t]ag to Episode 5.02 'Good God Y'All'" since "after watching the episode I would have liked something more between Dean and Castiel."[82] Both fans expand the archive of the meta-text by their additions, contributing to its multi-dimensionality and the multiplicity of voices it unites. Engaging in "particular transformative processes […] as pertinent as more overtly subversive fanfics" (Leavenworth and Isaksson 68), these two voices represent the fanwriters' explicitly non-idolizing stance towards the authors of the meta-text, since they do not accord their own

[82] In fannish terminology, a *tag* (also called *post-ep* or *coda*) is similar to a missing scene but tends to be set after the end of an episode, chapter, or movie part. Usually rather short, tags represent frequent expansions of the fannish archive (also cf. "Episode Tag").

creations a lesser status but stress their equality by affirming their stories' capacity to adequately fill in the gaps the meta-text unsatisfactorily leaves open.

Stating that "[t]his story begins as [*Twilight* novel] New Moon ends," goldengirl2707 overtly verbalizes this unbroken connection between meta-text and fan-text and offers a prime example of Barthes's demand that "one try to abolish […] the distance between writing and reading" (*Image* 162) by eliminating the boundary between reading *New Moon* and writing her own "I Can Never Forget You." Set after Meyer's novel, her story extends the archive by filling in the interrupted plot line between the second of the four novels and its sequel *Eclipse*, vesting the fan with the authority to provide a possible version of events that negates Meyer's sovereignty of interpretation as it is likely to contradict what Meyer imagined to take place in-between her books. Situated in a void of the meta-text, goldengirl2707's story therefore makes use of *Twilight*'s invitation to fanauthors to fill its emptiness in the best tradition of Fiske's "producerly" (42) texts, while other fans may, for instance, apply fanfiction's expansionist drive to transforming the meta-text in instances that appear to be fixed in the published book, "solidified, calcified, or at rest" (Derecho 77) for consumption: As such, angel eyes1 uk's story "My Secret Leech," for example, demonstrates the archontic nature of fanfiction through its "deviations" from the "basics of Eclipse canon" that make her story fundamentally at odds with the meta-text. "[*O*]*nly the reader speaks*," as Barthes would say (*S/Z* 151) of the fanwriters' reconstruction of their status, and so a story that shows "what would happen if Dean didn't hold it together after the events of 'On the Head of a Pin'" (morgana07) coexists with the meta-text where Dean did hold it together. In the archive, as I have illustrated, no text is superior and no external archon controls which texts are deposited and what place they are accorded.

Addressed in many Author's Notes, the fans' expansion of the archive of the meta-text in all directions and layers thus underlines the significance of a Barthesian deconstruction of the author in fanfiction. Instead of granting the producers the right to provide one singular version, they show in their tags, missing scenes, codas, or alternate universes that democratic participation successfully trumps the hegemonial author. Engaging in producerly activity to liberate the meta-text from the confines of the printed pages, the aired minutes, or the rolls of celluloid, fanwriters extend the fictional universe towards multiplicity and infinity. Representing "our first and formative encounters with the text" (J. Gray, *Show* 3), the paratextual Author's Notes constitute the space where fans

voice their agenda, therefore functioning as a means to address the issues at the heart of fandom. They allow fanwriters to communicate where exactly they place their story in the textual archive of the fandom—or where they transform it—and permit them to give detailed descriptions of where and how it adds to and alters the meta-text. In short, A/Ns are not only instrumental in pronouncing the author dead but actively facilitate the murder.

With fans also combining both the construction of fanfiction as an archive and the fannish truism that "[f]an fiction exists because there is something faulty" (Kustritz 383) in Author's Notes, introductory comments such as the ones quoted in this chapter are consequently highly representative of the fans' construction of their agency and power. As the excerpts from Hatteress and numerous others verify, A/Ns overtly call attention to Barthes's empowerment of the reader, signifying the deconstruction of the meta-text and its author in fanfiction's archive: Powerfully, they convey fannish interpretational sovereignty and authority in regard to the meta-text and accordingly "give writing its future, […] overthrow the myth," and affirm the "death of the Author" (Barthes, *Image* 148). Instrumentalizing A/Ns to conceptualize the meta-text as inherently defective and to open it up for transformation in both details and "[m]ajor storyline changes" (dbdbdb) supports the fans' deconstruction of hierarchies in the archive by permitting them to express a decidedly postmodern and poststructuralist stance that dismisses the figure of the sacrosanct author as an "ideological product" (Foucault, "What Is" 159). As this chapter has presented for the first time in fan studies, it is not necessarily in stories but in particular in Author's Notes where fans voice how the producer can no longer function as a "subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father" (Barthes, *S/Z* 211) of writing; with the two approaches of pointing out the shortcomings of the meta-text and reframing it as archontic in nature, A/Ns provide a distinct space for verbalizing one of fanfiction's most fundamental principles. Located in the undefined intermediate "between text and off-text" (Genette 2), Author's Notes underline how fanfiction as a genre cannot believe in the pre-Barthesian "Author-God": An intrinsic part of the text that can neither be disregarded nor undervalued, they accordingly serve as an essential means of communicating the fanauthors' agenda to their audience, affirming that the meta-text is "wrong" (Desertfyre) and how fanfiction "adds more dimension" to "a familiar story" (Maat). Ultimately, the strategies of empowerment in Author's Notes thus powerfully reconstruct the fanauthors as "citizens" (Hartley 40) instead of subjects: They establish the participation of a grass-roots movement in an archive of cultural production that becomes increasingly less

defective—i.e. 'more perfect'—with additional entries, proving how the "once godlike power" of the author "has democratized, to become everyone's responsibility" (Hartley 43).

3.2.2 "it's my story and I said so": An Apotheosis of Fannish Authorship

"[I]t's my story and I said so," Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker adamantly insists in extensive Author's Notes; Caazzie states, "this is my story, and this is how I wanted to write it." Emphatically, both of these fanauthors assert their power as authors by using their paratextual comments to emphasize their own creative potential and their own will as a driving principle behind their texts: It is "my story," the two respectively claim in a vocal assertion of ownership; Caazzie even adds that it is written just "how I wanted" it to focus the reader's attention on herself as an individual and completely sovereign agent. In their Author's Notes, both of these fanwriters situate themselves as the sole origin of their texts, assuming the role of a pre-modern omnipotent and omniscient author who, as this chapter is meant to illustrate, is still immensely influential in fanfiction writing and whose presence in literature and literary studies has always echoed the biblical "creative fiat" (K. Burke 54) of John 1, where God is declared to be the sole origin of all creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. […] All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1.1, 1.3).

Before Barthes declared the author dead and deconstructed the "Author-God" (*Image* 146), his status consequently *was* "godlike"; he was seen as "a giver of life" and the "personification of singular origin" (Hartley 24). Derived from the biblical emphasis of how the "Word" is not only intricately connected to God but *is* God, the author came to embody creation and his words were seen as divine messages. "In pre-modern societies," writes Hartley about the roots of the idea of the sacrosanct author, "the mystery of origination belonged to gods; and from the gods authorship gained its own existence and authority" (24). In this concept, the figure of the author represented the transfer of the Judeo-Christian God's "creative fiat" to humanity, enabling mere mortals to imitate divinity in assuming the power of creation with their writing. Their texts epitomized and contained the 'author-ity' of their author, conveying a teleological—and "theological" (Barthes, *Image* 146)—message inserted by the author and meant to be exegetically

deciphered by an audience of 'disciples.' In a similar vein to the biblical god, authors were therefore perceived as both the origin of creation and its end since their quasi-divine status gave birth to the text and limited its meanings to a firmly circumscribed intended message.

Entering literary studies under the label of *Romantic Author*, this construction of the author as "originator and genius, as fully intentional, fully sentient source of the literary text, as authority for and limitation on the 'proliferating' meanings of the text" (Bennett 55) was born at the latest with the English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850), whose aesthetic theory praised above all "imagination and originality" and awarded the "poetic genius" a "central [role] in creating and shaping the artistic work" (Busse, "Return" 51; also cf. Wordsworth). This perception of the author, which was based on an "as yet unchallenged faith in the sovereign Author as source and centre of the reified text" (Aragay, "Introduction" 11) represented the "apotheosis" (Jaszi and Woodmansee 3) of the medieval writer, turning the latter from an often anonymous *scriptor*, who needed an outside 'authority' to rely on and who was meant to imitate instead of originate, into the Romantic genius—a "sole creator of unique, original works" (Woodmansee 25). In connection with the increasingly important print culture that supported the genesis of an authorly self-awareness by giving a writer's thoughts a fixed shape and form—and, most importantly, enabled them to attach their name to it—, the English literary and political landscape of the eighteenth century presented an ideal "coming together of legal, economic, and cultural circumstances that needed and thus created a myth of originality" (Busse, "Return" 50). It is in these years that the myth of the author is born; in which the "Romantic image of the solitary artist scribbling away in an unheated garret" (Scafidi 12) originates to dominate literature and literary studies for decades and even centuries to come—it is the Romantic author Barthes seeks to deconstruct and declare dead and whose centrality to interpreting texts according to his/her alleged intention he seeks to diffuse.

Influenced by the first copyright statutes such as the English 1707 Statute of Anne that redefined ideas and 'mere' aesthetics into material worthy of protection and inserted economic aspects into cultural production processes, the notion of the author as an individual genius that possesses the unique power to create original works began to take hold on modern thinking, transforming the emerging emphasis on the 'self' into a criterion of literary production. Romanticism thus founded a tradition of the author as a powerful figure that exerts full agency over his—and only later, her—work, transforming in this process the "adaptive stance" (Balestrini, "Adaptation Studies" 7) dominant in pre-modern

Europe to deeply affect, for instance, the emerging US-American literature of the early nineteenth century, where it "fostered dreams of originality reflective of national genius" and "was meant to elevate both the artist and the nation she or he might represent" (Balestrini, "Adaptation Studies" 7). As such, the literary landscape on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean was strongly influenced by the belief in the "Author-God," which began its rise to a dominant cultural image that continues to hold its sway over contemporary culture and institutions: Determining discussions of literature and media production in particular outside of academia, it remains a powerful concept fanfiction needs to struggle with in its attempts to restructure the media industry according to more democratic principles of participation.

Despite Barthes's influential 'murder' and despite our present-day knowledge that the "by-now-familiar scene of the lone writer in the garret, struggling to compose an utterly unique text, marked with the author's genius" (Diogenes, Lunsford, and Otuteye 32) has always been a fiction retroactively imposed by a culture infatuated with a cult of individualism,[83] there still persists a view of the author that postulates him to be, in the words of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, "a second Maker; a just Prometheus under Jove" (207). For our present-day culture, according to Hoffman and Langer, a Foucauldian literary anonymity apparently constitutes an unbearable and intolerable condition (136), since both the person and the signifier of the author continue to perform substantial functions in today's media landscape that reify his position as the divinely inspired prophet who transmits valuable messages in his writings. In contrast to the humanities, which accord the poststructuralist deconstruction of the authorial subject major room in their debates, the author lives on in almost any other field (Busse, "Return" 54-55; Hoffman and Langer 132; Bennett 109),[84] with the media industry in particular

[83] Hartley, for example, reframes the allegedly greatest author of all times, William Shakespeare, as a "*media producer*," calling him "a shareholder in one of the first English capitalist joint stock companies" where "he combined with others—writers, actors, entrepreneurs, and shareholders—to make money by providing commercial entertainment to anonymous consumers for profit" (27). Similarly, J. Gray draws on intertextual references to point out that Shakespeare can "only be considered a singular author of *Hamlet* if we foolishly imagine the text to have no past or future" ("When Is" 90).

[84] Pertinent to the significance of the self in US-American culture (cf. Newfield; Bercovitch), the death of the author has always been less definite in US-American literary discourse, which supported the author's productive powers throughout the twentieth century (Hoffman and Langer 132) and even restored the authorial subject to the 'authorless' theory of poststructuralist intertextuality due the importance of the "cultural ideology of the Self—as individualistic, independent, self-reliant—[…] in American history and culture" (Friedman 157). As an example, Susan Stanford Friedman mentions Nancy K. Miller's concept of

professing that he has not only survived but actively refusing to acknowledge his death. Far from "diminishing" (Barthes, *Image* 145), the author thrives and impresses his mark on both his texts and literary culture as a whole. Today's writing is therefore not necessarily compliant with Foucault's sentiment of how the "writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality" ("What Is" 143); instead, current perception of the author remains very focused on this very individuality and celebrates not so much the corporeal writer who sits in front of his computer, typing his assigned 1,000 words a day, but rather the genius of Romanticism, the "solitary artist scribbling away in an unheated garret" (Scafidi 12), whose need to convey his divinely inspired words to posterity compels him to write.

As can be seen in numerous examples of A/Ns and other texts, this construction of the author role as "heroic authorship" (Johnson and Gray 5), which is so dominant in the media industry, heavily influences fanfiction, with the "Author-God" in its Romantic apotheosis representing the opposite part of the binary fans are caught up in. Conceptions of individual genius and creative power still resonate highly with contemporary media producers, finding their expression in the statements of writers like George R.R Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire*; 1996-) and Anne Rice (*The Vampire Chronicles*; 1976-2003) or in the stance of large franchises like Lucasfilm that insist on complete ownership of their story worlds, both in moral and economic terms. "My characters are my children," avers Martin, vocal in his opposition to fanfiction: "I'm against it," he says; allowing fans to write would be a "mistake." Infamous in her resistance to the fannish belief in the shared ownership of texts (cf. Ross 83), Rice justifies her authoritative warning of "I do not allow fanfiction" with references to both the commercial and emotional aspects ascribed to the role of the Romantic author: "The characters are copyrighted," she writes on her website, "[i]t upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters." Powerfully, these writers seek to assert their authority, invoking the dichotomy of producer-consumer in their rhetoric. The "story," in an echo of a common demand of the media industry, needs to be celebrated "the way it is" (Harmon; Murray 11), affirming the allegedly unique work of genius that contains the divine "Word"—never to be altered lest it lose its message and 'author-ity.' Despite the "death of the author," contemporary media culture seems fixated on the idea of the divine author, with debates about the issue of authenticity

"arachnology" that "insists on reintroducing the spider [to the intertextual web]—as author, as subject, as agent, as gendered body, as producer of the text" (Friedman 158; cf. Miller).

in adaptations[85] or the publication of writers' interviews, biographies, and memoirs abounding to affirm Busse's proclamation of the "Return of the Author": Disproving Barthesian thinking, he/she appears to have come back (or to have never left), since today the "author's persona, background, and credibility become the ultimate measuring stick for any critical approach" ("Return" 49).

Contrary to the quasi-omnipresence of fanfiction online and the pervasiveness of the elimination of the author in the scholarly realm, the concept of the author—the sanctified and glorified original author, the 'god'—is thus still very much alive and figures as a powerful antagonist to fanfiction and its fanauthors. While in principle in support of fanfiction, J.K. Rowling, who created the fan-favorite *Harry Potter* universe, accordingly defends her identity as the "Author-God," contending that "she is guardian of the universe, both as its originator but also as protector against trespassing" (Busse, "Ghost"). In her aptly titled essay "If the Author is Dead, Who's Updating Her Website?," fanauthor Angua, for example, illustrates the various strategies Rowling employs in upholding her status, citing the opening of her website *J.K. Rowling* in May 2004 as a pivotal event in her affirmation of authorial control over her text and its fandom:

> With one stroke, Rowling established herself as an authority over her fans—judging the quality of our websites, setting tasks for us to perform, and (in the "Rumours" section) giving a thumbs up or thumbs down to many of our fan theories such as the "Snape is a vampire" theory and the "Dumbledore is time-travel Ron" theory. Sometimes she mentioned individual fans by name (or online nickname), with words of praise or gentle teasing.

As with many other media producers, Rowling thus constitutes a prime example of how Barthes's powerful message of the author's death has never fully arrived in contemporaneous debates about literature, where the writer still figures as "a central focus through which we analyze texts and interpret meaning" (Busse, "Return" 49; Friedman 157-59). She is the one to judge fannish theories, declaring them 'right' or 'wrong,' and directs fandom with "setting tasks" not unlike a puppet master. Here, as with her second website *Pottermore* that features stories set in the *Harry Potter* universe apart from the seven novels, Rowling proves that individual power and creative genius continue to resonate highly with ideas of the author, providing an antagonist fanfiction constantly

[85] Cf., for example, the discussions all over the web when Peter Jackson's adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* hit the cinemas in 2001-2003; or their reprisal with the movie installments of *The Hobbit* in 2012-2014. The intense debates prove time and again how fidelity may be a category "at the fringes of the study of adaptations, but […] dominates popular reviews and fan sites" (Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation* 20-21; also cf. Stam; Hutcheon).

needs to prevail against: Both *J.K. Rowling* and *Pottermore*, where Rowling seeks to main control over the fictional universe by 'officially' expanding it instead of leaving this domain to the fanwriters, illustrate how fanauthors are thus pitted against producers who praise their own originality, ownership and uniqueness; as 'Author-Gods,' they deny the genre's construction of the meta-text as a "continual work in progress," since their own work is set to "shut down the discourse when it appears in unchangeable print" (Busse and Hellekson, "Introduction" 8).

The fanauthors' oppositional force in the dichotomy fanfiction has been situated in since its very beginnings, the sanctified author as the "fully intentional, fully sentient source" (Bennett 55) and a "device for *limiting* rather than *expanding* meaning" which "reduc[es] what any text or discourse means to the intentions of its designated originator" (Hartley 29) has curiously also come to play an essential part in fanfiction writing per se: Strategically, fans have appropriated this construction of the author role in their stories to underline their power *as* authors, transferring its alleged unique authority to their personas despite the genre's intrinsic participatory set-up and deconstruction of the author of the meta-text. Besides the latter's "death," their Author's Notes, I have found, also demonstrate the fans' emulation of the powerful genius that determines both the text and its interpretation; there they frequently invoke the figure of the Romantic author to underline their agency to dominate and control their stories and their readers. In short, fanauthors like Caazzie who insist that "this is my story, and this is how I wanted to write it" utilize what Genette determines to be the "chief function" of paratext (cf. chapter 3.2) —they conceptualize their A/Ns to "*ensure that the text is read properly*" (197) and to ascertain "a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the [fan]author)" (2). Ascending to the position of the "Author-God," fans transform the liminal space of the paratext to be a limiting and limited space: The story is construed to be singularly dependent on the fanauthor, with its entire meaning predetermined and waiting to be deciphered. In a nutshell, fanauthors thus verbalize here their agency to "actively direct the story's audience into a certain, pre-meditated reader position and thus to curtail the very sort of interpretive and agentive practice that they themselves are engaged in while writing fan fiction" (Herzog, "'But this'").

Exploiting J. Gray's proposition that "[a]uthor*ship* is quintessentially about author*ity*" ("When Is" 103), fanwriters thus use their paratexts to take authorial control in the best sense of the sacrosanct author of both our construction of the author of the

Romantic era and his re-ascendancy to power in our contemporary media landscape and literary culture: In an apparently paradox contrast to the aforementioned type of A/Ns, fans explicitly revoke the Barthesian death of the author in this type of Author's Notes, declare him 'undead,' or resurrect him to a position of rather unchallenged power, agency, and authority. In the course of my research, again two main strategies have become apparent through which fans evoke and emulate the status of the Romantic author, focusing on different aspects of the figure of a "creator of rare genius who produces masterpieces of unique, individual expression out of thin air" (Clerc 124). First, fans compose Author's Notes that not only affirm their individual identity but construe it as highly relevant for writing stories and for interpreting them by preceding their texts, for example, with an "a bit about me"-section that provides a brief fan-ography and "more information about me as a writer" (QuixoticQuest) to highlight the causal relation between the fan and the story. As a second strategy, fanwriters invoke the power of the "Great Creator" (Kazimierczak) by providing introductory comments for their stories that seek to establish a fixed limit on possible readings of the text or attempt to enforce the fanauthors' own opinions on their audiences. Contrary to the genre's inherently open space, these Author's Notes encroach on the readers' freedom of interpreting the character, the story, and the meta-text in fundamental ways when they, for instance, declare *Supernatural*'s Sam Winchester to be "one of the most tragic fictional characters ever" and claim that he is "deep and compelling," albeit "seriously underappreciated" (blue-jean-serenades).

While both of these mechanisms express the fanwriters' power over the text and its audience and reveal their belief in the figure of the traditional author, who is vested with far-reaching authority in regard to his creation and its consumers, the differences in assuming this role become immediately apparent on studying the fannish paratext. Many of the fanwriters foremost draw attention to their own individual selves without overtly dictating or even manipulating the reading practices of their audience; instead, they emphasize the significance of their own distinct identity in the production process of their story and foreground on their individual agency. As such, they actively recall practices of both the media industry and the mainstream literary market that seek to elevate the author and position him/her as markedly different from the other members of his/her community: Evoking the archetypal figure of the author as an 'outsider' attributed with special powers that has its roots in the allegedly blind Greek poet Homer and the blind seer Tiresias as portrayed in the myths of ancient Greece, contemporary media production and marketing

accentuates the (extraordinary) biographies and lives of authors such as *Twilight*'s Stephenie Meyer, who has not only given significant numbers of interviews about herself since the novel series' debut in 2005 but who was also ranked as one of *TIME* magazine's "100 most influential people of the year" (Brown and Kung) in 2008 and one of *Forbes*'s "most *powerful* celebs" (Kaufman; my emphasis) of 2009. To a large extent, today's media landscape depends on the resurrected author, who exerts his domination—or, in Barthes's reading, 'tyranny' (*Image* 143)—over wide areas of textual creation: Even TV networks and film studios are "keen to offer us [a single personified] author," J. Gray concludes in his study of the DVD boxes of the 2001-2003 *Lord of the Rings* movies (*Show* 99), a trilogy that has several hundred contributors.

Fans who construe their stories as immediately dependent on themselves thus follow a dominant pattern of our present-day media landscape and its marketing strategies. While they have no economic aims since they do not intend to sell their stories for money,[86] these fanauthors nevertheless apply the same principles in presenting themselves as gifted individuals who have something important to say and contribute to the fannish archive. Introducing a story with the words that its plot "is something similar to what I've had happen" dismisses the traditional idea of fans as a large anonymous mass and foregrounds the person of the writer, in this case RunWithJacobBlack, whose announcement that she wants to "raise awareness to the subject of donating life" draws additional attention to her biography and infuses it with greater power through the magnitude of the subject she writes about. Fanauthors like her use their individual selves and the stories of their lives to elevate the status of their fanfiction stories, informing their readers of the significance of their own personal experience and history in the likes of interviews with authors accompanying the publication of a new book. Similar, for example, to British author John le Carré who outright admits to writing about himself in an interview the German magazine *Der Spiegel* printed a few days after the German translation of his 2013 novel *A Delicate Truth* became available,[87] fan Rae666 "decided

[86] In contrast to commodity culture, fanfiction is based on a gift economy that relies on "free exchanges of information and goods from individuals to a group, or from one individual to another" (Rebaza 85). Without receiving monetary remuneration for their writing, fans stress the importance of sharing material, knowledge, and texts within their community, expecting in return support and free access to stories; "failure" to accede to these standards is considered "socially damaging" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 63). For further discussion of the concept of the fannish gift economy, cf. chapter 3.3.2 of this dissertation or cf. Rebaza 84-124; Hellekson; Fiesler 745-53; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 47-84.

[87] In this interview, John le Carré is quoted as having said, "ich porträtiere in meinen Romanen gern Menschen, die mir vertraut sind. In diesem Buch [*A Delicate Truth* / *Empfindliche Wahrheit*] vor allem

that I could probably put more of myself into this story" and presents a fanfiction text revolving around "my mind."

Such "semi-autobiographical" texts, in which fans "take something from [their] personal life and give [their readers] a little gift" (ShelbySue) draw on one of the most fundamental ideas of US-American society, which has always relied on the master narrative of the exceptional self. "Individualism lies at the very core of American culture," writes the influential scholar Robert N. Bellah, and US-Americans, who (still) make up most of fanfiction's participants, specifically "believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual" (142). Mirroring Jay Parini's statement that autobiography constitutes the most "essential American genre, a form of writing closely allied with our national self-consciousness" (11; also cf. Woods 337), these stories thus draw on powerful precedents such as Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1771-1790) or Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) to construct fanauthors as powerful entities who assume agency both in their lives and texts. Similar to their more famous models, they focus the attention of the readers on the person writing the fanfiction, establishing themselves as legitimate authors whose own stories matter; in short, I argue, the stories of "My Life My Rules My Journey My Pain" (BloodStainedSoul) represent a form of life writing that is both worthy of being written and being read.

Valued by fellow fans, who "like remembering that there are people producing these stories that we're reading" (Kanarah J), as I have indicated in chapter 3.1, A/Ns thus frequently contain personal information to establish an intimate connection between the writer, his/her text, and his/heraudience: Individual experience becomes an oft-cited motive for writing and features prominently in fans' Author's Notes to alert the readers to the person of the fanauthor behind the words on the page or screen. A story that, for instance, reworks *Twilight* to have one of the protagonists lose her father to a heart attack is read through a different lens if the fanauthor beforehand informs her audience that she "actually got the idea of this story today [since she] got a phone call that a family member […] was in the ICU at the hospital and not expected to make it" (MichelleRae). Quite analogously, NINEtimesDEAD writes "a new story sparked by the recent earthquake in New Zealand," emphasizing that "I live where it hit" to suggest both her intimate

mich" (152). He goes on to describe his protagonist as a "Doppelporträt meiner Person" (152), i.e. as an amalgamation of a younger, less experienced and a later, more enlightened self.

knowledge of the event and to reinforce its "tragic" character. While one might suppose that both of these fans use their stories and their writing to come to terms with what has happened in their lives, they also refer to these incidents to underscore the agency they have in respect to the meta-text: They im*print* their biography on its fictional universe, transforming it to include their experiences in order for the archive to reflect their personal stories and thus their individual persons. Both highly transformational events such as the "horrible tragedy" of a man opening "fire [in a store near the author's home] with an automatic weapon, killing six and then taking his own life" (Delwyn) and little incidents such as seeing "my little nephew with his new baby sister, promising her that he would always look after her" (Munchkin Jeeves) thus enter the archive of the meta-text, bringing the individual fanwriter into its storyworld. In utilizing their paratext to draw attention to their biographies and their own unique selves and experiences, fans thus assume power over the meta-text, underline their productive agency, and ascertain it as being in no way inferior to that of the professional authors.

The hype the contemporary media market creates around its authors therefore immediately translates to fanfiction writing, with fans creating their own examples of life writing or drawing on "something that personally happened to my best friend" (TwilightChronicalsGirl) to establish their authority in terms of an "apotheosis of authorship" (Jaszi and Woodmansee 3) dependent on the presence and existence of an individual with an accessible biography. They deny Foucault's contention that in writing, "the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality" and is "reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence" ("What Is" 143). Instead of their screen names representing a quasi-anonymous Foucauldian "author-function" ("What Is" 148), fans fill them with life, infusing their *Author*'s Notes with a sense of self and individualism to signify the *pre*sence of the writer. The frequency of A/Ns containing the words *I, me, my/mine*—usually presented in contrast to *they, them, their/s* as references to the original creators—is overwhelming and supports the paratextual construction of the fans as a contemporary embodiment of the Romantic author: Declaring their stories autobiographical in A/Ns, they construe themselves as the source of the text, its quasi divine beginning and end.

Author's Notes, as these above examples illustrate, provide sufficient room and liberal space for fans to affirm their personal identity, permitting them to construct an author role dependent on and influenced by past biographic incidents and anecdotes. Their

paratext negates the allegedly universally valid death of the author proclaimed in postmodernism and poststructuralism—and, paradoxically, even in fanfiction—, ascertaining instead that their major theorists have only murdered "certain types of authors" (Busse, "Return" 54)—none of which is the fanfiction author. In the tradition of gender studies, postcolonial studies, queer studies, and similar fields that maintain and even assert the figure of the author (cf., for example, Busse, "Return" 54-55), fans furthermore often emphasize specific characteristics such as their sex/gender, ethnicity, or age and attribute their writing to, for instance, a "reality of female life not observed in Twilight" (behappy101). In "fandom," as Francesca Coppa accordingly affirms in recognition of the genre's large female presence, "the author may be dead, but the writer—that actively scribbling, embodied *woman*—is very much alive" ("Writing Bodies" 242; my emphasis).

Similarly, fanauthors draw attention to their nationality and the languages they speak apart from fanfiction's default language of English, underscoring their specific ability to contribute something to the fannish archive that originates from their identity as non-native speakers of English.[88] Alterite, for example does not only describe herself as a "28-year-old French girl" on her *FF.Net* profile page,[89] but states in her Author's Notes that her story "Fountain, I will not drink" is a "one-shot based on a French nursery rhyme," which she quotes in French and English to emphasize both her intimate connection to her country of origin and her contribution of making it available to other readers. Moreover, various stories relocate the meta-text's protagonists to other countries, with non-American fans stressing their knowledge of the respective country's culture and language in their paratext to signify their authorial agency: Asserting "I'm British myself, a Londoner," victorwebsterx's A/Ns, for instance, assure her "American readers" that she knows what she is writing about as her story is set in a British restaurant; femme-mal provides extensive information as to her Chinese background in the paratext of her *Twilight* story "Lovers' Academy AoE" that includes "cultural notes," a lengthy

[88] As indicated earlier, R. Black focuses on this very point in her study *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction*: Extensively she elaborates there on how Nanako, a native speaker of Mandarin, inserts her knowledge of the language and Chinese culture into her stories to create an online fanfiction identity, whose inexperience in story writing and weaknesses in the English languages are offset by her non-American background (75-97).

[89] The focus of an earlier, unpublished study of mine, *FanFiction.Net*'s profile pages constitute a rich source of information as to the ways in which fans seek to establish a distinct author identity, with many of them providing their sex, age, and nationality but also using this paratextual space to elaborate on their favorite fandoms or their writing and reading preferences to emphasize their own individual personality.

explanation about how in “Chinese culture, family names come first,” and an enumeration of Chinese terms used in her story together with their translation into English. Strategically, all of these fans utilize their identity to increase the value of their writing in the eyes of their community of readers and to affirm their interpretive agency by turning the person of the author into a vehicle of transmitting the ‘truth’ about a specific story setting or cultural references made in the text. To transform Coppa’s above quoted words then, in fandom not only the “actively scribbling, embodied woman” is “very much alive” but instead the “actively scribbling, embodied” author of either sex or gender, of different nationality and ethnicity, of different age and experience is “very much alive”—they all function as an “originator and genius, as fully intentional, fully sentient source of the literary text, as authority for and limitation on the ‘proliferating’ meanings of the text” (Bennett 55).

As these Author’s Notes demonstrate, fans here construe the person of the author as constitutive for their textual production and conceptualize the story as immediately dependent on the individual identity, life, and experience of the respective fanwriter: Again, stories become a form of life writing—they connote the authorial power of the single fan and the community’s collective power in filling the meta-text’s archive with texts that reflect the presence of its members. Besides ‘murdering’ the author, fanwriters, it needs to be said conclusively, thus also reject and revoke the death of the author and resurrect the all-powerful author from Romantic tradition by emphasizing their biography to illustrate its significance in the writing process and to express personal ownership over both story and meta-text. Moreover, I have also found fans to compose Author’s Notes that engage in an even more direct translation of the power of the Romantic author to their texts as they utilize the ideal of the omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent author of quasi-divine status to promote their own interpretational sovereignty and creational power: This second major subgroup of A/Ns in this context strategically invokes the power of the “Great Creator” (Kazimierczak) to enable fans to play a formative role in the reception of their texts, influencing the reading processes of their audience according to their own intentions. These Author’s Notes re-introduce the author as “a special participant in the production process” and “the only one worthy of attention” (Woodmansee 16) and thus allow the fanauthors to inhabit a prominent position of singular creative agency: They dictate both what is in the story and how it should be read “because, well, it’s my story

and I said so" (Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker)—content and interpretation fully depend on "what I wanted to happen" (flower-envy).

Powerfully, fans insist with these A/Ns on a traditional approach to the author role, composing paratexts that leave little agency to the reader and elevate the writer to a quasi-hegemonial position that seeks to counteract the genre's fundamentally democratic impulses. In these Author's Notes, participation in the construction of text, meaning, and the archive in general is discounted; in contrast, fans detailedly prescribe any minutiae of "my story." Giving specific instructions in regard to both reading and interpreting, they provide information on "This happens" and "Other Things You Need To Know" (beyond-the-twilight) to guide their audience, to take them on a leash, and rein them in. Assuming the power to grant little agency and liberty to the reader yields Author's Notes such as the following by Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker that even comment on such details as the eyes of a rather minor character and seek to enforce a specific reading of just about every aspect of the story's plot, characters, setting, place in the archive, universe, and graphic practices:

> *Italics* are Ruby's P.O.V./confessions. ***Bold Italics*** are character thoughts and flashbacks. This story is AU as mentioned in the summary and will include the pairing of Dean/Ruby. Of course the Ruby in that pairing will be the blonde Ruby who was portrayed in Season 3 of Supernatural by Katie Cassidy. Timeline wise, this story begins somewhere between the end of season 3 and the beginning of season 4. Like I said, this is AU so there will be no brunette Ruby or Sam drinking demon blood. Also Ruby's background has been changed a little bit for this story. I thought it'd be an interesting take on the whole Ruby remembering what it was like to be human thing if Ruby was only half demon in this story. Okay so that might sound confusing, but it will be explained further in the story. Castiel will be involved because he has the all important task of dragging Dean's butt out of hell. Since this is AU, I can honestly tell you that the whole rising of Lucifer thing will not be included in this story. Lucifer will not rise because, well, it's my story and I said so. As far as baddies go, yes Lilith will be involved and so will the breaking of the seals. Now I know I just said that Lucifer won't be rising in this story and that is true because, well, I have Lilith's part all panned out. Anyway, as far as Sam goes, yes he will be getting a pairing of his own, but you'll just have to wait to find out what pairing that will be. Oh and I don't know if Lilith's eyes can turn black like the other demons do although I do know that her eyes turn white. So for the sake of this story, her eyes can't turn black since they obviously turn white.

Insisting on the fact that this is "my story and I said so," Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker's A/Ns relegate her readers, who have "to wait" until all "will be explained," to rather passive receivers of her 'plan.' Dictating her story to be an "interesting take" on the fictional universe, she predefines the distribution of the characters' roles by announcing that Castiel has an "all important task" and that Lilith

features as one of the "baddies"; moreover, she discloses parts of the plot with foreshadowing the "pairing of Dean/Ruby" and the "breaking of the seals," but nevertheless does not entirely share her full authorial knowledge with her audience to retain an even higher degree of power: Positioning her fellow fans as non-agents, she asserts that they will "just have to wait to find out." Generally construed as an assertion of the authority of the author, her Author's Notes even stipulate Ruby's appearance and hair color only to end with the ultimate evocation of Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker's personal power; she decrees that solely "for the sake of this story" she alters the meta-text according to her purposes.

As Daddy's LiL HeartBreaker and others illustrate, the figure of the author has not lost any of its capacity of enacting a powerful influence on the text and its readership; instead the presence of these Author's Notes suggests the continual and unceasing "apotheosis of authorship" (Jaszi and Woodmansee 3) that has led to the author's dominance of contemporary media, literary culture, and marketing. Fans frequently emulate the significance of the iconic author when they seek, for example, to prescribe the emotions their stories are supposed to evoke in order to influence the reception in significant ways. "This is *heartbreaking*," writes carryonmy-waywardson, addressing her readers to elicit a certain emotional status during the reading process: "I won't lie. So if you don't want to cry, don't read." Aside from offering a possible warning or deterrent to her audience, she here prepares them to read the story along her own terms and intentions—that it works is illustrated by other fans' feedback as exemplified, for instance, in a review by Book-BoyObsessed956439, who confesses to be "bawling on my keyboard" because it is so "saaaaaaad." Unrestricted in their power over the readers, fanauthors utilize their paratext to even define a character's status and interpretation, fully aware that they thus turn into a "device for *limiting* rather than *expanding* meaning" (Hartley 29): Via A/Ns, *Supernatural*'s Sam Winchester authoritatively becomes "lover of Dean, patricide, desperado" (frostygossamer) and *Star Wars*'s Luke Skywalker "a bit of a softy/not-a-whiner" (Romanticized Missile Fire).

The "Author-God," to recall Barthes's essay, here fully exerts his tyranny in centering the reception of the stories on "his tastes, his passions" (*Image* 143) and seeks to establish the "single 'theological' meaning" that is transmitted to the audience as an unalterable and non-negotiable "message" (*Image* 146). Reading becomes dependent upon what the fanauthor intended—upon what "I always wished" (RedHann). Advice to "Read

[these A/Ns] Before You Start," since they contain the "real message" (katinki), reverberates with Genette's assessment that paratext foremost "*ensure*[s] *that the text is read properly*" (197) and instates the author as an omnipotent creator of the Word that needs to be divined to a powerless audience. Such fans who dictate—and even manipulate—reading processes and who establish a distinct authorial self that creates the text and its meaning illustrate the powerful presence of the figure of the author and its significance in fanfiction. While the genre in itself is immediately dependent on an active dismissal of the producers of the meta-text, fanauthors nevertheless draw on the "intense fetishization of and dogged belief in the singular author in Western societies" (Johnson and Gray 5) to translate the contemporary "cultural fascination with [the author] and […] the super powers ascribed" (Johnson and Gray 2) to its role to their own identity. Invoking both the biblical creative fiat and the emphasis the author receives in the present-day media landscape, fans therefore rest their claims to authority over the meta-text on the inherent link tradition dictates to exist between authorship and power. Strategically, they present themselves as powerful figures whose very self and being is both constitutive and formative for textual creation and reception by using their Author's Notes to underscore their influence. In these instances, the reader, conversely, has little agency left and is relegated to a consumer of "my story" who is not permitted to shape the text or find fault with it. "If you don't agree with this story, then fine. Don't review," writes Dark Satirist, whose A/Ns mirror that the interpretive stance fanauthors assume in writing about the meta-text, i.e. declaring it defective and open for it to be corrected, does not necessarily apply at all times within the community. Their authorial authority thus dominates their text and audience, while the very presence of their stories denies the creators of the meta-text any kind of analogous power.[90]

Fanfiction and fanwriters, as Author's Notes continuously substantiate, draw their power from multiple sources and indicate it through a variety of strategies. A/Ns that simultaneously deconstruct the meta-text and present the fanwriter as an embodiment of the powerful author in the tradition of Romanticism serve as ample illustration of their function of negotiating between divergent roles fans can assume and which they employ in the construction of their specifically fannish author role. My examples reveal how the

[90] Leora Hadas comes to a similar conclusion in her study of a *Doctor Who* fanfiction archive, finding that the rules of the archive exert more power over the fanwriters than the creators of the meta-text: By fans adhering to the site's stipulations, "the owners of the archive are granted a position of gatekeeping that is denied the owners of the copyright."

fans' claim to agency is not only based on a Barthesian death of the author but instead presents itself as multi-dimensional and multi-sourced. Notably, the figure of the "Great Creator" (Kazimierczak) exists side by side with the dead author, demonstrating the manifold strategies fans employ to cement their authority and ownership of the fannish archive. Via the tactical usage of Author's Notes that frame fanfiction as a kind of life writing and the production of inspired 'second makers,' fans thus portray themselves as empowered gatekeepers over their stories and the meta-text, drawing on a powerful and longtime tradition of the omnipotent divine author of both US-American and Western culture in general. Against the backdrop of a transaction of power from the meta-textual creators to the community of fanwriters, the genre therefore also relies on the individual—on an emphatic assertion of "I created this" (Phee-Nyx-1244)—as a foundation for making possible the genre's democratic "[w]e, the fans" (hazel-3017). Adapted from an analysis of the Transcendentalists of the 19th century, it can accordingly be stated that fanfiction's "democracy began with [the fans'] radical individualism" (Newfield 18): In the genre, the powerful individual coexists with the powerful community, enabling fanwriters to exert power on the media industry in both roles (cf. chapter 4)—as authors and as transformers of the meta-text that has no author: Their simultaneous presence reconstitutes fans as active producers and has "my story" deconstruct the alleged status of the meta-text.

3.2.3 "We, the fans"—The Power of the Collective Author: Writing in the Digital Age

"Culture is collective," concludes Susan J. Clerc in her study on *Who Owns Our Culture*, recognizing that, in contrast to what the producers of the meta-texts seek to enforce, our contemporary practices of media production and consumption largely deny the myth of the Romantic author as the primary figure of creation, since "we all contribute, we all take, we are all audience, including future authors" (188). What we *do* negates the singularity of the author emphasized in the media industry and its marketing strategies, which seek to counteract the realities of our era of Web 2.0 that is not only a social space as *Facebook* or *Twitter* evidence but most of all an "information commons" (Rebaza 86) that rests on "collective knowledge building" (Ross 24). The present-day individual is no longer a genius, no longer a creator of supreme talent, but instead takes part in a collective production of both knowledge and cultural artifacts: Websites like *Wikipedia* rest on a collaborative 'team effort' (cf. Chon; Cupitt) and today constitute

important cultural resources[91] that embody how "collaborative, fused, remixed authorship [is increasingly becoming] all the more obvious *and normative*" (Johnson and Gray 5), all the while the idea of the Romantic author remains largely persistent in the large parts of the media industry. Movies or TV shows, for instance, which unlike any other medium are immediately identifiable as a collective effort, i.e. as a product of many contributors from the script writers and the actors credited by name to numerous below-the-line workers who remain unnamed and unrecognized, are still advertised as individualistic products of, mainly, their directors or showrunners: As such, Peter Jackson has become basically eponymous with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy despite the fact that the DVDs "introduce us to many of these crew members who contributed to making it all possible" (Gray, *Show* 94),[92] *Star Wars* is hardly ever referred to without naming George Lucas as its creator, and, as I discuss later in more detail, the creative team behind *Supernatural* tends to be reduced to its long-time executive producer Eric Kripke (cf., for example, Zubernis and Larsen, "Playing God")—the media industry is, after all, "keen to offer us an author" (Gray, *Show* 99).

In spite of these efforts to ensure the "survival of our modern fiction of the author as the sole creator of unique, original works" (Woodmansee 25), contemporary practices based on the multiplicity and multi-voiced structure of the Internet are increasingly reconfiguring notions of authorship and the production of culture. The spreading digitization of every area of life has initiated, as Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst argue, a reconstruction of cultural appreciation that "is no longer authorial, deriving from the individual voice of an immediately present person who is named and recognized" but "from unseen heads and hands who, usually unrecognized, piece together

[91] Due to the immense success of *Wikipedia*, fans have also appropriated its design and technology to create fan-wikis that work with fandom's collaborative and collective nature to build up encyclopedic sites such as *Lostpedia* (for the US-show *Lost*; 2004-2010) or the *Supernatural Wiki* that self-defines as "an information resource that records the details of the CW TV series, *Supernatural*, and of the fan community that has grown around it. The 'wiki' model of the site […] allows any visitor to contribute their own knowledge of the show and the fandom. The multi-authored nature of the site" is meant to "provide an [as] exhaustive collection of information as possible" ("Super-wiki: About").

[92] The fact that the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is almost singularly attributed to Peter Jackson can be considered particularly astounding since the movies—and especially their DVDs—have an overt "democratic interest in all the 'little' people who make up the grand front" (Gray, *Show* 94). In his study *Show Sold Separately*, J. Gray dedicates a lot of attention to uncovering the DVDs' "Fellowships of the Disc" (91-104), revealing, for example, that the *Two Towers* DVD includes interviews with 113 out of 163 credited cast or crew members. Moreover, the credits for the movie even include all the names of the members of the official *Lord of the Rings* fanclub (which results in a running time of close to thirty minutes).

a whole from fragments" (63). Despite the presence of showrunners such as *Supernatural*'s Kripke, some critics and parts of the media industry increasingly acknowledge TV as an "intensely collaborative medium" (Mittell), creators of open-source software like the Linux operating system "agree that their interests are better served by collective effort and free redistribution of source code than by emulation of the Romantic model of authorship" (Scafidi 118), and numerous book writers such as the US-American author Mark Z. Danielewski invite their readers to become contributors to their production of literature (cf. Probst and Trotier). Collaboration, as these examples evidence, appears to be turning out as one of the key words of the early years of the twenty-first century, with digital media constructing a "picture of collective authorship that unites the labors and creative work of unofficial and official producers" (Stein, "#Bowdown" 403) to significantly redefine the figure and function of the author. Far from the Wordsworthian ideal of the author, contemporary digital practices embody the belief that "open collaboration simply produces better results" (Scafidi 117) since they void and overturn the limitations of the single mind, single creativity, and single experience to supersede them with multiplicity and its collective knowledge.

Nevertheless, the "'dispersal' of authorship and […] authority" (Bennett 101) which ensues from today's practices of communal production, and which is particularly evident on the Internet with its vast numbers of "micro-producers" (Hartley 39), cannot solely be considered a consequence of the current Web 2.0 era but, as Mel Stanfill so aptly writes, "[n]o act of authorship comes ex nihilo": Instead of being born with *Wikipedia* or similar sites, it needs to be acknowledged that our present-day collaborative digital democracy is based on age-old traditions of oral culture and the "kind of public domain" (Bazin 24) of the European Middle Ages—the contemporary "communal online sandpit" (Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 116) rests to a large degree on the medieval concept of "communal stories" (Pearson 12). Similar to both past and present oral cultures, the written literature of Western societies prior to the first copyright statutes of the early eighteenth century kept its myths and stories in free circulation, to be told, to be read, to be used, to be rewritten, to be transformed, to be appropriated according to any storyteller's or writer's will and purposes.[93] Texts belonged to their communities, with no

[93] As mentioned in a previous chapter, I rest my argumentation here on the written literatures of the European Middle Ages since some scholars see an immediate link between fanfiction and this era of literary production. Most of what I refer to, however, also applies to both earlier and contemporary oral cultures which rely on the "collective participation of members of the society in any social process or activity"

individual able to claim ownership and authority to provide the 'right' and 'final' interpretation so as to make texts inherently fluid, open, and as such always the product of the collaborative effort of several, if not hundreds or thousands of individuals who re-wrote or 're-spoke' their "communal stories." The writer, or *auctor*, whose function in this context resembled that of a scribe or copyist,[94] served as someone "*who channel*[*ed*] *system-level or institutional authority into text*" (Hartley 25), i.e. he was the one to put communal and collaborative authority to paper by transcribing the circulating texts and in this process wrote "the words of others as well as his own" (Bennett 39). In contrast to later constructions of the author that prized originality above all other qualities, medieval writing accordingly depended on the presence of other texts and gained "its value and authority from its affiliation with the texts that precede[d] it, its derivation rather than its deviation from prior texts" (Woodmansee 17). Its "communal stories" thus used words from the past kept alive in their respective communities to tell their stories anew, with writers just a vehicle for providing yet another version in the collaborative creation of a public commons—or a textual archive. Individuality counted little to nothing, with much of medieval literature published anonymously such as the Old High German Lay of Hildebrand or in explicit reference to previous texts to emphasize the communal creation and authority at work.

The Middle Ages were thus characterized by an "expressly collaborative writing milieu" (Woodmansee 26) that continued to be the major mode of writing until the Renaissance when literary production still "derived" its "authority […] from other writers" (M. Thomas 412) and even Shakespeare was rather a "*media producer*" (Hartley 27; J. Gray, "When Is" 90) than an "Author-God." It was only the eighteenth century that saw the birth of the Romantic genius whose singularity was so famously pronounced dead by Barthes in the late 1960s and, as I have illustrated above, whose brief reign has not managed to terminate practices of collaboration: In the United States, for example, "peer

(Ogunjimi and Na'Allah 14). This participation, for instance, transforms the story being told in each performance via the active collaboration by the listeners (de Ramírez 1-13). Cf., for example, Ogunjimi and Na'Allah on African oral cultures; de Ramírez on Native American oral tradition.

[94] In his *Medieval Writers and Their Work*, John A. Burrow elaborates on "four ways of making a book" (29) in reference to a 13th-century classification by the monk St Bonaventure, who distinguishes the scribe/*scriptor*, compiler/*compilator*, commentator/*commentator*, and author/*auctor*, all of which fundamentally depend on using the "words of others" (30). As Burrow rightly notes, St Bonaventure does not markedly differentiate between the *scriptor*, whose writing consists of "adding nothing and changing nothing," and the *auctor* since "even the *auctor* does not […] write only his own words" (30). On practices of medieval authorship, also cf. Minnis; Woodmansee; Bennett 38-43.

response techniques and small group collaboration have been advocated and enjoyed by some citizens and teachers since the colonial period," as Andrea A. Lunsford and Lisa Ede demonstrate in their article on "Collaborative Authorship" (420), and the revolutionizing force of the Internet has today led to the "birth of the new, aesthetic Middle Ages, whose origin is to be found in the accession of the masses to power" (Bazin 24). Contemporary practices may thus be the answer to the question Martha Woodmansee poses, asking if the "author in the modern sense [may] prove to have been only a brief episode in the history of writing?" (16)

While Woodmansee, writing in 1994, only sees the "potential" (28) for this to happen and André Bazin claims his proposal to be "risky" (24), fanfiction prominently proves the resurrection/endurance of collaborative authorship, reviving the idea of "communal stories" and the notion that writing, even under an individual fanauthor's name, foremost translates and channels communal authority into text. Collective and collaborative production of text is one of the inherently defining characteristics of the genre, with its dialogic structure, to briefly recall Bakhtin, creating a fundamentally heteroglot archive of many voices that together assume ownership of the meta-text and their stories. Fandom's "tenets," as Jules from the *Supernatural Wiki* administration team says in an interview, are "creativity, collaboration, and community," which her colleague Lea supports by defining fandom to be "like a collective mind" whose individual members work together to enlarge the archive in communal action—just like "a beehive." In fanfiction, numerous practices evidence the intense collaboration its writers engage in and the fact that the "authorship of the[ir] stories is shared" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 126) illustrates how the genre transcends institutionally more prevalent ideas of joint authorship that rest on the identification of each participant and his/her contribution—and which is, for instance, the only form of collaboration protected by US-American copyright law (Jaszi 50-51).

Despite most stories being published by a single fanauthor,[95] fanfiction accordingly does not rest on the concept of discrete and separate texts that bear no other traces of

[95] Certainly, however, not all of them are: *FanFiction.Net*, for example, allows screen names that combine the names of two or even several writers; according to search results, more than 10,000 of those exist that post the products of "our minds […] combined" (Maki and digitally obsessed). Moreover, the same story can also be posted by several writers to make their collaboration obvious (cf., for example, the story "Angel At My Table" by Greenaway and cinnamon twist101 that was posted on the very same day with the very same text and paratext and was always updated simultaneously).

production than those of the writer who posts them. Inherently, the genre's nature is that of an intratextual archive whose meaning is generated by the accretion of texts and the totality of the archive. Stories, as evidenced by the fanon, are in constant dialogue with each other, every text always both a response and a reference to other texts. So recognizes Ika, for instance, that whenever she writes a "couple of simple words […] they come already heavily pre-packaged with a whole host of connotations and associations" (qtd. in Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 34)—characters, storylines, settings, etc. have always been already developed by others, have entered and influenced the archive to loom large in the collective memory of fandom. Ultimately, each story can thus be considered a "narrative shortcut" (Falzone 245) to the larger archive, implying the wide fictional universe created by the collaboration of numerous, or even countless contributiors. Despite sometimes numbering just a few dozen words, stories accordingly become "mega-texts" (Coker 94) that negate singular ownership and belong to every member of fandom. Together with the multi-dimensional communication between different fans, fan-texts, and the meta-text as illustrated in the second chapter, this dialogicality marks fanfiction as fundamentally collaborative and the "work of a collective community" instead of that of "individual audience members" (Booth 22).

Apart from the dialogic archive, fandom's abovementioned "tenets" of "collaboration" and "community" can be seen even more obviously in other characteristics of the genre. While fanfiction integrally rests on the suspension of the dichotomy between producer and consumer, i.e. the integrated writer/reader identity of the fanauthor that endows *everyone* with the capacity to participate, it moreover emphasizes and depends upon ample influence and support from within the community: No story is written by an individual in his/her lone garret (cf. Scafidi 12) but the fans' practices "have unquestionably always involved a significant component of helping others: teaching other members about resources and tools, giving feedback on others' fan fiction, offering personal support and even charitable donations" (Kligler-Vilenchik et al.). Manifestations of fannish collaboration are omnipresent, ranging from models of joint authorship in which writers, for example, alternate in writing chapters to explicit references to other stories in summaries or Author's Notes, from the acknowledgment of individual fans who contribute to the writing process to feedback, or responses to such feedback. Fans therefore actively engage in creating "communal stories" that overtly recognize the realities of writing—i.e. that no act of alleged Romantic authorship can be truly individual

and individualistic since the production of text always involves many voices that, for instance, publish a book, film a movie, or produce a TV show.

As with other constructions of the figure of the author, Author's Notes play a particularly crucial role in affirming the collaborative processes of fanfiction because they enable fans to render visible the significance of collaborative authorship within the genre. As such, I have found, they serve as a strategic means to illustrate the dispersal of ownership and authority that defines fanfiction's democratic participatory structure, which in turn provides the basis for a reshaping of the media industry along fannish principles of collaboration, communication, and the representation of the many (cf. chapter 4). In A/Ns, fans openly acknowledge that they are not alone responsible for their writing, attributing others with authorial agency that spreads authority to a multiplicity of voices and therefore relocates it from one person to the whole community. Here it becomes especially evident that no single writer retains ownership over 'their' story, illustrating how a text does indeed "reside in the hands of the fans" (Larsen and Zubernis, Introduction 8)—i.e. the plurality of fans and not the singular fan. Exemplarily, these fanwriters demonstrate that ownership can be dispersed, can be communal, can rest on infinite participants, thus preparing the grounds for transferring this approach to authorship to the production of the meta-text. Their Author's Notes provide ample evidence of their own democratic collaboration, showing that "your input/reviews would be wonderful" (kitty maire), that "[e]very suggestion will be taken seriously" (P.T Kraj), that others "deserv[e] a majority of the credit" (SierraKathleen), and that one fan's story provides the "back story" for another fan's "cleverly crafted tale" (Ridley C. James).

Author's Notes that emphasize the inherently collective, communal, and collaborative nature of fanfiction abound, with nearly every fanauthor using their paratext to engage in an overt dialogue with their audience to draw them into the (future) writing process or to acknowledge their participation in their (past) writing. Stressing how authority and ownership are shared among different community members or how the fandom at large has significantly influenced and altered the story underscores fans' strategic usage of A/Ns to negate that one singular individual can produce a book, TV show, or movie. Once more, two main subtypes of Author's Notes have emerged in the course of my research that serve as mechanisms to establish the multiplicity of fans as agents and gatekeepers of the meta-text and construct fannish collaboration as a particular cultural value which "simply produces better results" (Scafidi 117). A first group

highlights the intercommunal help, frequently naming the participating individuals and their functions in detail to offer profuse gratitude to all involved: A/Ns that give a "big thanks" to fellow fanauthors for their "creative advise" and suggestion to "stud[y] up on […] comma rules" (Midnight Ariel) illustrate the dialogic archive that can only emerge from the input of various fanauthors. Furthermore, a second group of Author's Notes focuses even more specifically on this heteroglossia as it emphasizes the archive's distinctly democratic and communal construction. Instead of relying on the meta-text as an impetus for their writing, fans here cite the fanon or other stories to have inspired their own, substantiating that the community's production substitutes the producer's meta-text as a point of reference by A/Ns that articulate how "[t]his story is sort of based on *Vampire? No thanks* by VampWolfGirl" (TheAllbrighton). In short, these two types of Author's Notes establish collaborative authorship as the founding principle for the fannish archive, with fans working together both on single stories and the larger fictional universe.

Via the paratext of A/Ns, the meta-textual archive therefore ceases to belong to its respective legal owners but is transferred into the possession of fans who construct themselves as members of a powerful community whose interaction is crucial for their agency and acts of appropriation. Accordingly, the first of the abovementioned types of Author's Notes draws particular attention to the fannish participatory culture and its accompanying dispersal of authority by giving fanauthors the chance to identify by name their fellow writers that were specifically involved in the production of the story or by inviting readers to have their share in future stories. In addition to mentioning "CapriciousC and Kaydee1005 [who] really helped out a lot," MsKittyCullen, for instance, gives "[s]pecial thanks to my go-to girl: Ohgeekyone" and praises her because she is "wonderful, she always makes me feel better about my work and she is ever so supportive." While her A/Ns remain unspecific in terms of who contributed what exactly to her story, they nevertheless fulfill the double function typical of this group of paratextual comment since they, first, support communal cohesion by showing MsKittyCullen's gratitude and, secondly, evidence the shared authorship and—in consequence—the shared authority of the story by explicitly naming her supporters. Similarly, Mad Server overtly recognizes how she cannot claim the story she posted as her own, pointing to the immense degree of collaboration in fandom:

> I had so much help on this one, like so much help. Wave obscura answered niggly questions. Hanson's Angel helped me out with hospital logistics. Enkidu07 gave me imaginary banana chips. Onefulloctave overcame school and

> work and work and school to give me carefully considered beta lovin'. Pdragon76 surmounted night shift craziness to give me tons and tons of food for thought. The remaining unclarities are allll mine. ("The Kissing Curve: Delirium Remix")[96]

Clearly, Mad Server here outright denies the role of the Romantic genius author since she had "so much help" from numerous other fans. What makes these and many similar A/Ns additionally noteworthy is the fact that shared authorship in the fannish understanding is not at all restricted to the process of writing: Even though some of the fans Mad Server names contributed actively to the story in answering "niggly questions" and solving problems with "hospital logistics" in regard to the plot, social interaction is considered just as important as more overt influence on the text. The process of editing accordingly becomes "beta *lovin*'" (my emphasis) and support in the form of "imaginary banana chips" ranks high in a 'hierarchy' of help; last but not least, Mad Server's reference to her long exchanges with Pdragon76 that gave her "tons and tons of food for thought" allude to the genre's generally dialogic nature and the emergence of the archive in a collaborative manner.

Profusely, Author's Notes include the names and contributions of individual fanwriters, making 'thank-you' remarks such as the above ubiquitous and an outstanding characteristic of the genre. *Beta*-readers, i.e. fans that "loo[k] over a story before the author posts it publicly, checking it for some combination of spelling, grammar, cohesiveness, flow, plot holes, characterization, etc." ("Beta"; also cf. Karpovich) are some of the most sought for and appreciated people in fandom, with *FanFiction.Net*, for instance, hosting an extensive list of fans who offer their *beta*-services to help with the "grammar and the spelling and whatnot" (Devil917). Underlining these fans' essential participation to signify the shared authorship and ownership their contribution entails, such A/Ns that overtly recognize a fellow writer's "awesome idea" (Shadowman 747) or their "awesome editing skills" (LailaB) therefore allow fanwriters to construct the entire process of writing from the "idea" to the "editing" as being decidedly communal in nature. Apart from being thankful for details such as "fixing my mistakes and 'Americanising' (or

[96] In addition to being based on "so much help" from the community, Mad Server's story also 'remixes' a story by wave obscura, thus illustrating the highly collaborative manner of fanfiction writing on yet another level, since, in the fannish context, *remixing* refers to fans transforming another fan's story according to a set of principles that "include (but are not limited to): retelling the same events from a different character's point of view, switching the narrative voice (e.g. from first to third person), changing the tone of a story, focusing on a different point in time in the same sequence of events, covering a smaller or larger scope of events […]" ("Remix").

should that be 'Americanizing'?) my words," fanauthors even underline how other fans "gave me the courage to begin writing" (lilmssomething) to create a causal dependency between their identity as a fanauthor and the support from other writers: Everything from basic proofreading and correcting small orthographic mistakes to providing the story's entire plot or even initiating a fan to fanfiction in the first place is construed as shared responsibility of the community.

Advice and input, as these Author's Notes illustrate, therefore rank high in fanfiction and visibly negate the sway of the singular "Author-God." Nevertheless, the community does not only present their stories as the product of deeply ingrained collaboration via acknowledging the presence of *beta*-readers in A/Ns that precede a posted—i.e. 'finished'—story; furthermore, the communal and interactive nature of fanfiction extends beyond the past into the future: Most stories feature Author's Notes at their end or between chapters which actively invite the readers to participate in the process of writing and meaning-making, either by asking them for their opinion in the form of feedback or by requesting ideas for stories and chapters to be written. "I'd love to hear what you think," states, for instance, primarycolors in a direct address to her readers; "any constructive criticism would be appreciated," says JediMara77; and perfectsmuttyvampire claims that "reviews are going to be the only thing that decide the fate of this story, and as such, they are important!" No matter what its exact wording, feedback is granted great agency in fandom as it determines the course of a story, influences future chapters, and in general "motivates [fans] to keep writing" (embrace-the-deception). "Remember the more you review, the more we write," states Frescafanatics, expressing that the entire genre depends on the participation and contribution of its members. The audience, as these Author's Notes show, represents a fundamental part of the process of writing a story, with fans constructing each and every story as a *WIP*, a Work in Progress.

So very omnipresent in fanfiction writing as to make Bronwen Thomas speak of a "review culture" ("Gains" 146), feedback accordingly constitutes a powerful means to facilitate the integration of readers into the production of stories, with the extent of this collaboration evidenced by additional Author's Notes that explicitly acknowledge the influence of reviews. Far from powerless, readers shape the fluid text of fanfiction in order to co-create and co-design their fannish space together with the writers (cf. R. Black, "Digital Design" 116-17): "Okay," blue peanut m and m writes in A/Ns that overtly respond to her audience's feedback, "after recieving some reviews, which I enjoyed

reading and valued the opinion of, I figured I better come back and add this [detail] in." Truly, fans construe fanfiction as a dialogic genre in which the various voices of its participants count. The readers ascend to a position of power; they have the agency to alter a story and they even have the agency to generate stories since they "actually make me think I can write! So, because of that, I'm trying again" (historylover). Via fanfiction's system of "please read and review" (Nikki loves Naill; also cf. Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 90) the audience at all times contributes to shaping and creating the heteroglot archive so that readers are no longer mere readers but have a say and thus share the writers' authority over the texts of fanfiction.

What is more, the fannish emphasis on the principle of the empowered audience and integrating readers into processes of production provides the framework for redefining their own role in the relation between producers and consumers and initiating a reshaping of the structure of the media landscape in general (cf. chapter 4). As they practice it in their own writing, they demand the incorporation of the audience into the production of the meta-text, exemplifying that readers have the agency to exert power over the text and its producers in a democratic model of authorship that is founded on collaboration and multiplicity. Whenever an Author's Note highlights how much fanauthors value feedback, it in turn signifies the fans' demand for their voices to be valued as well—for being listened to, acknowledged, and accorded an active role in the creation of the meta-text. In addition to their own integrated writer/reader identity that does not differentiate between the two roles to acknowledge that in fanfiction producer and consumer are no longer physically and conceptually removed from each other,[97] A/Ns such as these thus support the fannish insistence on reframing their position: If, as Anik LaChev states, "readers and writers overlap" (88) and contribute to writing as *fanauthors*, then one cannot be powerless and the other powerful but their hybrid identity makes them have the same agency and the same authority.

Both the identity of the fanauthor and the interaction of the community's members that provide "so much help" (Mad Server, "Kissing Curve") accordingly illustrate the significance cohesion and collaboration have in fanfiction. In addition, the communal construction of the archive majorly contributes to the dialogicality of the genre that has

[97] As mentioned before, I have sought to account for this hybrid identity by creating the terms *fanauthor* and *fanwriter*; nevertheless, I use *reader* and *audience* in my thesis to suggest a fan momentarily inhabiting a distinct role such as when he/she is in the process of reading another fan's story.

every voice participating in its model of sharing authorship and authority. Frequently, fans emphasize in a second group of their A/Ns that it is not the meta-text that has made them write and post a story but instead relate their text to that of another fan to highlight the leveling of hierarchies within the genre. Fanwriters, for example, compose stories that contain "Devorah's POV from my wonderful friend Alice's […] fic," integrally basing their texts on those of their fellow writers since, "Didn't any of you wonder what [Devorah's] thoughts were? And just how did she get into the story and how did she even know Senator Rath Parkere in the first place? Well, all the answers are here" (IzzyandDesRoxSox). Filling the gaps constitutes a central motivation for fans like IzzyandDesRoxSox, no matter if the blanks, to borrow Wolfgang Iser's term, stem from the meta-text or their fellow fanwriters' stories. Any text is thus construed as open and fluid to be transformed, amended, or rectified; any text is accorded the significance to be written about and to have its versions and transformations enter the archive. As such, the archive ceases to be specifically the meta-text's archive, since the meta-text no longer functions as its central focal point but dissolves to be just one among the many texts that contribute to the communal construction of the archive.

Emphasizing the archontic nature of fanfiction, fanauthors therefore appreciatively refer in their Author's Notes to other fans' stories, overtly attributing their writing to their presence to stress the equality of all texts:

> My pal Harrigan wrote an awesome one-shot called This Isn't Little Big Horn, based on an LJ prompt by rainylemons. It inspired this remix, which builds on the "off camera" moments of her story. While each fic stands independently, you'd be missing a treat if you didn't check out "Big Horn," too. […] The two fics can be read in any order. "Big Horn" can be found on this site by searching under author for Harrigan. A big thanks to Harrigan for the inspiration and the beta. (Scullspeare)

With her A/Ns, Scullspeare establishes her fellow writer's text as a fully legitimate addition to the archive, which is not only "awesome" and a "treat" but which most importantly has the potential to "inspir[e]" new stories, in this case her own. As Harrigan's story is in turn "based" on a fannish suggestion, both fanwriters and their texts are living proof of the insignificance of the meta-text that is relegated to a quasi Foucauldian "murmur" ("What Is" 160) in the background. Establishing the causal dependency between the two (or three) fan-created texts, Scullspeare's Author's Notes thus dismiss any hierarchies that may traditionally favor the meta-text; instead, she emphasizes the communally constructed archive by engaging in the common fannish

practice of creating *'verses*, i.e. elaborate and largely separate fictional universes that originate from another fan's story or stories and are often only very loosely connected to the meta-text, in particular when the *'verse* is very large and contains multiple stories by multiple authors.[98] Frequently founded on a completely different set-up that modifies central elements of the meta-text, *'verses* constitute particularly powerful examples of fannish agency that arise from fanfiction's collaborative nature and the fans' willingness to contribute to all kinds of stories, be they based on the meta-text or other fan-texts: As such, bellaBBblack explicitly defines her *Twilight*-story "Hidden Minutes" as a "fanfic for a fanfic," since she considers her fellow fan fewerbrokenpieces's "Every Waking Minute" to be "one of the best Jake and Bells stories I have ever read" and was thus "inspired by her fabulous writing and heartfelt characterizations […] to write a little drabble piece for her."

As these A/Ns reveal, fandom disempowers the meta-text as an impetus for writing in order to construct a multi-voiced and multi-dimensional archive that no longer privileges the meta-text. With each story equally contributing to the process of meaning-making and with every fan's voice adding to the heteroglossia and dialogue of fanfiction, Author's Notes that underscore the value of fannish creation and participation demonstrate collaboration and shared authority to be determining factors in fanfiction writing. The fan-text serves as a basis for the expansion of the archive, stripping the meta-text of its traditional status and redistributing power to the fans who collectively engage in transforming it. The archive arises as a product of collaborative action since it is visible proof of the fannish team effort—both in its assembled mass of stories in conversation and in each story that results from shared authorship and "so much help" (Mad Server, "Kissing Curve"). Fannish writing practices thus signify a kind of grassroots participation by awarding each individual fan a role in shaping the production of stories, the production of the archive, and the production of culture in general. Writing together can be a "mammoth effort" with "hundreds of hours spent on Yahoo chat deciding plotlines and writing the character's conversations" (Greenaway; cinnamon twist101), but in the end

[98] *'Verses* are particularly popular in the *Supernatural* fandom, with thousands of stories defining themselves as belonging to a fannish *'verse*, which may, for example, reconfigure the male protagonist Sam as a girl (*girl!verse*) or have the apocalypse happen (*end!verse*). Numerous authors—in the case of the *end!verse* about 160, according to a search on *FF.Net*—thus participate in communally constructing a specific, far-removed corner of the archive.

creates the very collaborative nature of fanfiction that enables the fans to voice their demands for increased participation in the larger context of the media industry.

Applying the concept of medieval "communal stories" (Pearson 12) and today's models of "collaborative, fused, remixed authorship" (Johnson and Gray 5), fans show that authority is not at all the privilege of a hegemonial force but can be dispersed and spread to all fans participating in their community's fanfiction writing. Explicitly, they disclaim the power of an individual in order to reconfigure agency as a result of communal multiplicity that engages in intense collaboration at every step of producing text. The way they build and define their archive via their Author's Notes consequentially needs to be read as a strategic redistribution of power since it emphasizes the genre's participatory and democratic culture that rests on cooperation and engagement of the many. Set against traditional media production with its clear binaries, collaboration, as Simon Lindgren writes, provides a "new set of rules that enable media users to […] find their own voices, map out strategies, develop common interests, and *forge political alliances*" (my emphasis).[99] Ultimately, it is Author's Notes that explicitly demonstrate this "political allianc[e]," revealing how a participatory and communal set-up functions, first, as a claim to fannish power by its integration of the multiplicity of fans and, secondly, as an impetus and a model for the restructuring of the media industry. When, as Hartley writes, "[e]veryone is an author" (23), i.e. "[b]illions of people" (38) and "*whole populations*" (39), hegemonial rule can be no longer upheld but has to yield to a more democratic model of collaboration that disperses authority and establishes each individual as a producer in

[99] Lindgren's "political alliances" can, for instance, be observed in fan activism that uses fannish "strategies and tactics to support campaigns for social justice and human rights, inspiring their supporters to move from engagement within participatory culture to involvement in political life" (Jenkins and Shresthova). An "urgent need for scholars to explore more fully the many different potential relationships between fandom and political life" (Jenkins and Shresthova) has led to a 2010 special issue of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, guest edited by Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova, that presents some initial research on fannish campaigns such as the Harry Potter Alliance, a large group of *Harry Potter* fans that dedicates itself to civic engagement and charity work such as funding the transport of supplies to post-earthquake Haiti or voter registration in the United States (Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture'"; Hinck). With more than 100,000 members and more than 70 chapters in almost every US state and numerous countries, the Alliance self-defines as a "coalition" of fans "who feel passionate about the power of story to inspire and affect social change. Just as Harry and his friends fought the Dark Arts in JK Rowling's fictional universe, we strive to destroy real-world horcruxes like inequality, illiteracy, and human rights violations" ("What We Do").

While fandom has always been active in terms of their objects of fandom, such as the famous "Save-*Star Trek*" letter campaign of the late 1960s, this new form of civic and political activism has Jenkins and Shresthova speak of "participatory politics" that redefines fans as "political agents and that draws on a range of different theories of citizenship and democracy to explain what happens when fans act as citizens."

his/her own right. Emphasizing this "new set of rules," the Author's Notes of fanfiction serve as the space to create this collaborative community of "we, the fans" who act as empowered "*citizens*" (Hartley 40) in a new media environment of participation and increasingly symmetric power relations.

3.2.4 "I'm here to reveal the *true* story to you": Fanfiction Writing as a Collaborative Practice of Dead Geniuses

"Fandom and Web 2.0," writes Jules Wilkinson in 2010, "are a match made in cyberspace—the Web helps us communicate, collaborate, and create faster than we ever have before, and in prettier colors." Notwithstanding the truth of this statement, the "*citizens*" of fanfiction use to the web not only to collaborate but also to ascertain their authority and agency in other ways that substantiate their claims to a more democratic mode of production. As I have shown in the previous subchapters, fanfiction is not at all characterized by a uniform model of authorship but the genre's practices need to be read as the collaborative writing of dead genius authors—as an intricate, and sometimes paradoxical, amalgamation and negotiation between multiple author roles with the goal to establish fandom as a powerful entity which has the agency to participate in the creation of culture. While their stories deconstruct the meta-text and redefine its position in the traditional hierarchy of cultural production via dissolving it in the archive, Author's Notes offer fans the space to establish their authorship and agency in manifold ways; in them, as my research has revealed, fans construct the identity and role of the fanauthor as the climactic representation of several sources of power.

Author's Notes that emphatically assert "I'm here to reveal the *true* story of Twilight to you" (Annabel Fate Juliet Gaisras) therefore epitomize the specifically fannish model of authorship, i.e. they illustrate the identity of the fanauthor in their explicitly three-fold manifestation of fannish power: The individual fan, "I," reaches out to her community of fellow fanauthors to present their collective "you" with her transformation of the meta-text that constitutes *Twilight*'s "*true* story." Simultaneously, Annabel Fate Juliet Gaisras dismisses the meta-text and its author Stephenie Meyer by disqualifying it as an insufficient—or even false—representation of its fictional universe, asserts the significance of the individual fanauthor, and displays her membership in a community of like-minded fans and co-producers. As her Author's Notes exemplify, fans thus

continuously assume a variety of author roles, are adept at instrumentalizing different models, and distinguish themselves by using their paratextual space to negotiate between them in order to explore and employ multiple sources of agency. Introducing their stories with A/Ns that specify the subsequent text to be a "lovely wintery oneshot for you, all tender and loving, just as Dean and Castiel should be (in my opinion)" (RoseandThorns666) accordingly emphasizes that the fanwriters' model of authorship combines the three larger author roles of Western cultural history and uses them to establish their claims. The Barthesian dead author helps fanfiction to transform the meta-text into how it "should be," the Romantic author helps fans to assert "my opinion," and the collaborative author of the Middle Ages and the Web 2.0 era disperses authority to a multiplicity of 'you's.' Discussed for the first time in my study, the fact that fans thus construe their identity as an amalgamation of these three models has therefore immediate repercussions upon the question of fannish agency, since, despite their differences, they all affirm the fans' power as active producers and participants in the processes of production.

Fanauthors, as my analysis has shown, accordingly negotiate their identity in their Author's Notes, informing their audience in this paratextual space of how they construct themselves, i.e. in which ways they assert their agency and which sources they utilize for empowering themselves. In addition, fans strategically employ their A/Ns to perform and substantiate their community's authority in drawing on different models of authorship that culminate in their hybrid construction of the fanauthor to legitimize their claims to more democratic participation in the production of the meta-text. As such, fanwriters provide an immediate participatory model for creating texts and cultural artifacts with their emphasis on the collaborative author, whose power stems from its dispersal of authority to the multiplicity of contributors, and use this concept to illustrate that the act of creating needs not depend on a single hegemonial voice. Moreover, they integrate the Romantic author in their construction of authority to support their demands as powerful writers and to constitute themselves as a force to be reckoned with by drawing on the almost mythical attributes of the "Author-God" as an originator of text and meaning. Last but not least, becoming a fanauthor is also ultimately dependent on disempowering the traditional hegemonial elite by murdering the author of the meta-text in a deeply postmodern approach to writing that enables fans to engage in their activities in the first place. Ultimately, fans thus create a power vacuum in their Author's Notes—a free space which

the producers of the meta-text used to occupy—that they can move into to fill it with the collaborative work of powerful fanauthors.

Far from being confined to a single fandom or one community, these mechanisms have surfaced as a general pattern in fanfiction, presenting one of the grand narratives—or even master narratives—fans use, on the one hand, to establish the legitimacy of themselves and their activities and, on the other, to substantiate their demands to increased participation in a more democratic model of media production. A crucial means of assuming and exerting control and authority over the meta-text, its producers, and its entire archive, fannish practices thus embody Marcus Schulzke's verdict that "popular culture prepares people for public life by allowing them to express their power in small ways"; among these practices, Author's Notes, I claim on the basis of my research, constitute a particularly significant way to "express power" and aid fans in restructuring the "public life" of the media industry. Via their intricate amalgamation of author roles, fans accordingly lay in their A/Ns the foundation for their "the long-term goal," i.e. "to create a more democratic culture, which allows the [fans] a greater role in decision-making at all levels" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 304)—it allows them to pursue a three-pronged 'assault' to revolutionize the media industry from the bottom as their A/Ns provide the space for the "*citizens*" of fanfiction to prove their "radical potential that threatens to dethrone the institutionalized authors and owners of texts in favor of a more truly democratic and interactive field of cultural production" (Mullens 7).

Conclusively, it can thus be said that the fannish model of authorship as illustrated and demonstrated fanfiction-wide in Author's Notes functions as an essential means of establishing the fans as a powerful body whose claims in regard to their agency are geared towards significantly influencing the media industry. Far from the Other of the 1990s, fanauthors of today aspire to be active movers and shapers of processes of production and the profound "equivalence of fan practices and political practices" (van Zoonen 63) facilitates an increasingly democratic transformation of the media landscape via fanfiction's democratic archive. Within this process, Author's Notes represent one of fans' fundamental ways of asserting their power, authority, agency, and ownership; next to other elements of fannish paratext such as their jargon, which I discuss in the following as a more global strategy, they exemplify how a specific paratextual category can contribute to fans' empowerment and the demonstration of their agency. Implicitly always directed at the producers just like their fellow fans, A/Ns as a means to "ensure the text's presence in

the world" (Genette 1) thus serve to establish the essential formation of "we, the fans" until the fanwriters can bring about their desired utopia and successfully "make [the producers] give the rights to us" (Heart Torn Out); in short, Author's Notes crucially aid fans in portraying the democratic potential of the collaborative writing of dead genius authors—they aid them in saying, "I'm here to reveal the *true* story of Twilight to you."

3.3 *Fanspeak*: Establishing Agency via "unclear acronyms and lots of punctuation"

> "Betrayal. Loyalty. Sacrifice. Love. And one promise from years ago whose legacy has yet to be unleashed. This may be the war against Caedus, but nobody knows who lurks in the shadows. Jaina, Jag, Zekk, Kyp, J/TK, H/L, Luke, OC's. LOTF AU post-Fury."
>
> NightSwordSW, "The Face of a Warrior."

> "Pre-Series, Teenchesters—It was just routine surgery. But this was Sam. Nothing was routine.—Sick!Hurt!Hospitalized!Sam, Worried!Awesome!Big Brother!Dean—John, Bobby, and Pastor Jim also included."
>
> Marianna Morgan, "One Thing Leads To Another."

> "She's a single mom who lives & works w/her dad. It's safe, secure. But sometimes security isn't all that it's cracked up to be and you need to open your heart a little. He should probably do the same. Fluff/UST/AH Alternating ExBPOV Rated M."
>
> 22blue, "Dragonflies."

"[U]nclear acronyms and lots of punctuation," as Karen Hellekson so poignantly characterizes the "strange" fannish jargon (113), abound in these brief examples of story summaries from the fandoms of *Star Wars*, *Supernatural*, and *Twilight*. Even on a first glance, the three texts are full of expressions of the fans' own "'secret language'" (Nash 4) and terms like *J/TK*, *OC's*, *Teenchesters*, or *AH*[100] seem like "vivid arresting gobbledygook" (Nash 3) to anyone unfamiliar with the fannish way of writing. Anything but meaningless "mumbo-jumbo" (Fahey 3) or an incomprehensible "crime against language" (Nash 3) for fanwriters, however, these phrases, I argue, acquire significant meaning for the fannish community and its construction of agency: Beyond using their jargon to encode the content of their stories, fanauthors like NightSwordSW, Marianna

[100] In the following, fannish terminology is generally shown in italics as the terms represent larger concepts of fanfiction; if I specifically quote from fan-texts, however, I nevertheless use quotation marks to indicate that in these cases I refer to specific texts. Moreover, I sometimes underline certain letters to facilitate understanding when I explain first the meaning of individual phrases.

To some extent, this chapter builds upon an article I previously published, which presented an initial study of the "twofold effect" of fannish jargon in respect to "fandom community-building" and the fans' identity as "experts in fanfiction writing" ("Power").

Morgan, and 22blue employ their specific fannish terminology as an important communicative practice that my study shows to have major repercussions on fannish claims to power and the fanwriters' position in the relation of consumer and producer.

In these summaries, *fanspeak*, as fannish jargon is generally called among fans, consequently has an explicit double purpose that transcends the (rather) superficial task of communicating information about the stories to their readers; instead, as this chapter discusses in detail, its major function rests on the fact that jargon *obscures* this same information from anyone who is not a fanwriter, which has it acquire essential significance, on the one hand, in the identity formation of the fannish community by serving as a strict boundary to exclude non-fanauthors (cf. Cohen 11-15; Allan; Joseph) and, on the other, in constituting fans as powerful expert writers. Incomprehensible to anyone from outside of fandom, the fannish "nonsense-language," as a common stereotype of jargon has it (Hudson 1), conveys essential features of fandom only to the members of their own community: Concisely, fanspeak informs fans about crucial issues pertaining to fannish writing and the archive in general, proving its multifunctionality in communicating a large variety of details. Via its complex terminology, it enables fanauthors to identify the characters featured in their stories, to clarify the relationships these engage in, and to reveal how they conceptualize both the characters and their relationships; it permits them to inform their readers of the setting of their story or its atmosphere, and to let them know about major plot lines and structural characteristics. As such, "Fluff/UST/AH Alternating ExBPOV Rated M" clearly constitutes more than just a brief way of expressing information; the fans' practice of using many "unclear acronyms and lots of punctuation" (Hellekson 113) overtly differentiates between 'those in the know,' and those who are not, i.e. the expert members of the fanfiction community and all others who are thus are denied immediate access.

As fans, readers of the above quoted summary of 22blue's story "Dragonflies" will therefore be immediately aware that the story is conceptualized as a rather lighthearted romance ("Fluff") that features both protagonists', i.e. Edward's and Bella's, points of view ("ExBPOV") and has any sexual tension between the characters remain unresolved, which also entails that the story does not contain any too graphic description of sexual acts ("UST"; "M"); moreover, all characters appear as humans ("AH") instead of being, as they would be according to *Twilight* mythology, vampires or werewolves. Similar to 22blue coding her story as taking place in an explicitly "AH" universe, Marianna

Morgan's summary uses fanspeak to attract readers of a particular trope of *Supernatural* fanfiction: Her description of her story as containing "Sick!Hurt!Hospitalized!Sam" and "Worried!Awesome!BigBrother!Dean" delineates not only the story's character constellation of a caring older brother and an ailing younger brother but her graphic portrayal with exclamation points connotes a very specific characterization of the two siblings that originates from a host of references to other stories in the fannish archive. Furthermore, Marianna Morgan overtly designates her story as an archontic expansion of the meta-text by mentioning that it takes place "[p]re-series," reconfiguring the adult brothers Winchester of the meta-text as teenagers ("Teenchesters"). In contrast, NightSwordSW's summary of "The Face of a Warrior" identifies the story as a transformation of the meta-text that veers off from the latter's plot at a specifically designated point of time: While it presupposes everything up to and including the events of Aaron Allston's meta-textual novel *Fury*, the seventh of nine volumes of the *Legacy of the Force* series (2006-2008), afterwards the story is meant to present a distinctly Alternate Universe ("LOTF AU post-Fury") version of the meta-text; what is more, NightSwordSW's use of fanspeak also informs her readers that her story features a heterosexual romantic relationship between the characters of Jaina Solo and Tiraku Kiftu ("J/TK") in addition to a slash romantic relationship between Han Solo and Luke Skywalker ("H/L"); last but not least, she indicates that not only the familiar characters of the *Star Wars* universe appear but also her own characters ("OC's").

Prime examples of fannish practices in regard to composing summaries or any other kind of paratext, these three quotes show how fanspeak's "unclear acronyms and lots of punctuation" provide crucial information pertaining to all dimensions of fannish story-telling, all the while they obscure the same knowledge from non-fans and non-fanwriters who have not (yet) been initiated into the fannish community. Incomprehensibility to outsiders has always been one of the major features of both fannish jargon and jargon in general, no matter if it appears as professional jargon, technical jargon, medical jargon, academic jargon, or as the specific language of any other field that features complex and not immediately transparent terminology. Even though the term *jargon* has a multifarious history (Hudson 10; Nash 4; P. Burke 2-4), the fact that it appears as largely unintelligible has defined its usage ever since its first recorded appearance to denote the twittering of birds, i.e. something just as unintelligible for humans as supposedly much of today's technicalese. Accordingly, Tom Fahey opts to forego a "fancy definition out of a

dictionary" and puts contemporary usage of *jargon* in a nutshell when he writes that in its most basic terms, "we all know what jargon is: It's talk that we don't understand" (4).[101]

The fact that others "don't understand," as Fahey writes, poses the central prerequisite for one of the major functions of jargon that Peter Burke, a scholar working on the interplay of language and community, identifies by declaring the "use of jargon by a social group […] one of the most potent means of inclusion and exclusion" (14). As I have found in my research, fanauthors in particular, since they are not linked by any professional, spatial, social, or cultural ties other than their common emotional attachment to their object of fandom and their activity of fanfiction writing, utilize fanspeak to establish membership in their communities, using their own shorthand—their "mysterious terms, abbreviations, and references" (Fahey 4)—as a "form of bonding" (P. Burke 14; also cf. Eckert 683) that creates cohesion among them, serves to integrate new members, and closes their ranks against non-fanauthors. While fanfiction in itself constitutes a kind of shorthand since its stories need not extensively describe familiar settings or portray characters its participants know from the meta-text and their previous fanfiction reading, I thus argue in the following that the widespread and prominent usage of fannish jargon represents a particular and deliberate strategy on part of the fanauthors to facilitate community-building and communal cohesion: Ultimately, "inclusion and exclusion"[102] represent key processes in the fannish use of jargon and in their construction of agency.

Exploiting the social function of language (cf., for example, Eckert 683; Lave and Wenger 105-09) to constitute themselves as a tightly-knit community, fanwriters accordingly do not only signify their own membership by knowing and using fanspeak but also employ this very fanspeak to establish themselves as a powerful group in opposition to the producers who, as non-fans, remain outsiders due to their lack of knowledge. As summaries that code content in terminology such as "J/TK, H/L, Luke, OC's. LOTF AU post-Fury" evidence, fanspeak erects a linguistic barrier between fans and non-fans to

[101] In this chapter, I use the term *jargon* without its frequent negative connotations of being "debased" or "barbarous" (Fahey 4), "pretentious" or "dreary" (Nash 3), and of being "used mainly by intellectually inferior people, who feel a need to convince the general public of their importance" (Hudson 3). Instead, I prefer Fahey's more neutral definition which tries to objectivize jargon by focusing on its incomprehensibility to the non-initiated/non-members, since to the person using it "the word or phrase is meaningful, it communicates, and it's often the only language appropriate to the situation" (6).

[102] Although the notion of excluding someone from the fannish community might at first glance go against the fans' egalitarian ethos, this is not really the case: As I explain at a later point in this chapter, fanspeak guarantees that interested non-fans can easily enter the community if they are willing to familiarize themselves with it.

function as one of the genre's most overt means of signifying membership or, conversely, non-membership—the latter of which fanauthors inherently associate with being powerless. A vital element of community-building (cf., for example, Cohen 12; McMillan and Chavis 9), the boundary established by jargon usage thus supports the fans' claim to agency that relies, on the one hand, on the powerlessness of non-members and, on the other, on the existence of a powerful community that forces the producers to take heed of their claims to agency and increased participation. In short, I argue that "the *us* versus *them*, the fan versus the nonfan" (Hellekson 114), as most poignantly communicated by fanspeak, pun intended, serves as an essential strategy in fanfiction writing to modify the fans' position in the binary of producers and consumers.

As briefly indicated at the beginning of this subchapter, my analysis has moreover revealed a second major function of fannish jargon, which I thus ascertain to represent a two-fold strategy through which fans affirm their own agency and authority. Resembling professional jargon that situates, for instance, doctors as capable members of their discipline and helps them to "communicate more quickly and effectively" (P. Burke 13; Hudson 6) with their colleagues, fanspeak constitutes a means for fans to establish themselves as experts that wield substantial power: Their use of language, I argue, intends to prove their superior knowledge in a variety of fields, especially in comparison to the producers—as a popular trope among fanauthors has it, 'fandom knows best.' With the rich terminology of fannish jargon, they demonstrate that they know best, for example, the practices of fanfiction writing, the conventions of their community, the extensiveness of their archive, and the details of the meta-text—in short, they demonstrate the immediate link between knowledge and power that already the English philosopher Francis Bacon recognized in 1597 when he stated that "ipsa scientia potestas est" (241), i.e. "knowledge itself is power" (253). In fandom, my research has found, creating a discourse of the fans' own is distinctly synonymous with expertise so that a summary like NightSwordSW's that ends with "J/TK, H/L, Luke, OC's. LOTF AU post-Fury" immediately establishes its author as an expert with considerable knowledge and, consequently, considerable power.

Significant in community-building and affirming fannish expertise, fanspeak therefore represents a complex communicative practice that fulfills major functions in constituting and affirming a powerful fannish identity. In contrast to Author's Notes that comprise only one—however essential—category of fannish paratextual forms, jargon

appears in all the different types of paratext,[103] which makes it a particularly valuable strategy of fannish empowerment to study in light of the aims of this dissertation. Featuring prominently in summaries, Author's Notes, disclaimers, warnings, pairings, and any of the other elements of the story header, fanspeak constitutes the most universal or global feature of 'strategic' fanfiction writing and has thus enabled me to add another—very helpful—dimension to my study that allows me to provide a more nuanced perspective of fannish strategies of power than a simple enumeration of gatekeeping mechanisms within individual categories of paratext would yield. Although jargon hardly ever appears in the continuous story text, fans employ it extensively in their paratext, which provokes a permanent need for readers to engage with the fans' claims to authority and the fannish powerful identity. The differing experiences this encounter results in then overtly illustrate the dual purpose of fanspeak: While an audience of fanauthors will continuously find confirmation of their own membership and status in the community, an audience of non-fans cannot circumvent this form of fannish gatekeeping—for the latter, in particular the producers among them, it thus becomes impossible to eliminate the fans' presence from the archive.

Accordingly, fanspeak serves as a major strategy in the fans' attempt to become a (more) powerful party and to alter their status in the traditional binary of active producer and passive consumer. Predominantly supporting the formation of strong communities and a considerable sense of superiority, fanspeak, I as I show in detail in the course of this chapter, functions as a tool of authority within the relation of fans and producers since it is inherently connected to, first, the issue of participation and, secondly, to the eradication of conventional hierarchies. Ultimately, my research thus reconceptualizes jargon from a mere linguistic feature of fanfiction (cf. Hellekson 113; Marx 10; Merrick) into an instrumental means of fannish agency—of redefining fans as powerful and the producers as powerless.

In light of this purpose of fannish empowerment, the abovementioned core characteristic of jargon, i.e. its complexity, represents the basis for its significance in both community-building and affirming fannish expertise: Foremost, it is its

[103] As jargon also allows for "[s]aying a lot with a little" (Fahey 79), i.e. enables communicating a lot of information in little time and space, fanspeak tends to occur in its most visible and condensed form in summaries, whose length is regularly limited by fanfiction archives. *FanFiction.Net*, for instance, only permits a summary to have a maximum of 384 characters, while the length of other paratextual forms such as Author's Notes remains unrestricted.

incomprehensibility that makes it so efficient as a strategic means of appropriation and demonstrating power. Far from being easy to grasp, fanspeak presents an obstacle to understanding in not only one but several ways, which has aca-fan Anik LaChev guesstimate from both her own and fellow fans' experience that mastery of even one community's terminology takes at least "between three and six months" (90). According to my study, this time and the effort it requires a fan to become competent in its use derive from the fact that fans demonstrate significant creativity in creating jargon, employing different schemata, patterns, and sources for coining terms and phrases, which means that deciphering a specific term does not automatically yield a model for decoding additional terminology and entails the necessity to have firm knowledge of fannish practices to be able to understand. Secondly, fanfiction does not at all feature a uniform and even distribution of jargon but all its fandoms share only a few general expressions, resulting in the prevalence of different manners of writing and speaking in different fandoms and different communities so as to force each individual fan to learn new terms whenever entering another corner of fandom. Altogether, it is the combination of jargon's various levels of dissemination and the versatility of its coinages that leads to the complexity of fanspeak—that has it "mak[e] little sense" (Hellekson 113) to any non-fanauthor.

While no literature exists on the resourcefulness of fans in creating jargon, my research has uncovered at least six different schemata according to which fans coin expressions, making their deciphering a rather complex process. One of the most productive and popular formation[104] patterns that can be found in almost any summary or any other occurrence of jargon is abbreviation, which, together with its two subcategories of acronym and initialism,[105] shortens complex phrases and concepts into, mostly, two-to-

[104] In the following, I draw on linguistics to shed light on the schemata fanauthors employ in *jargon formation*—a term which I use in deliberate reference to the linguistic concept of "word formation," i.e. the "creation of new lexemes in a given language" (Bauer, "Word Formation" 632), but which is here meant to also include semantic modifications. Moreover, I readily acknowledge that none of these patterns is unique to fanspeak since "[s]peakers change languages all the time" so that the "vocabulary of a language is never fixed" (Clark 270). Nevertheless, fannish jargon has never been analyzed in reference to *which* patterns occur and which conclusions can be drawn from its complexity.

[105] In reference to Bauer, I understand *abbreviation* to be the most generic term of the three, encompassing all kinds of "alphabet-based formations" ("Word Formation" 632; *English* 237), whereas *acronym* and *initialism* in turn only refer to specific types of shortened words: The former applies to forms that use the first components (letters, syllables, etc.) of the words or phrases to be abbreviated; this new word form can then be pronounced according to the phonological rules of the originating language (an example would be *NASA* for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; cf. Bauer, *English* 237-38); initialisms in contrast are formed in a similar way but the components making up the new word form need to be spelled out individually (an example for this would be *NSA* for the National Security Agency).

four letter word forms. A summary, for instance, that ends with "E&B implied AH, AU, OOC, NC17" (Luv'n Cullen) uses an abbreviation to announce the pairing Edward and Bella ("E&B") and four initialisms to specify the all-human alternate universe ("AH, AU"), the conception of her characters as 'out of character' in comparison to the meta-text ("OOC"), and the inclusion of graphic sex scenes ("NC17"). In addition to numerous fanfiction terms, of which *r&r*, *OC*, *OFC*, *OMC*, *m-preg*, *UST*, *OTP*, *HEA*, *PWP*, *WIP*, *non-con*, *RPF*, *BAMF*, or *NSFW* represent just a very small selection of phrases that are common to all fandoms, these evidence both the omnipresence of abbreviations and the large difference in their referential frames.

In a similar manner, fanauthors also employ blends, i.e. "words that combine two (rarely three or more) words into one, deleting material from one or both of the source words" (Plag 122).[106] Apart from merging two meanings into one word, fannish blends in particular are characterized by the fact that the emerging word transcends the meanings of the originating words to denote something previously nameless and unnamable. As such, fanauthors tend to favor blends for pairings, as a fanfiction pairing is usually more than just a single fictional relationship between two characters; instead, it frequently implies the specific corner of fandom a fanauthor belongs to, their interpretive community, and the approach they bring to the meta-text. After all, it is not for nothing that one of the most important details of the fannish identity is his/her *OTP*, i.e. his/her 'one true pairing' of any of the characters of a given fandom will situate him/her firmly within a specific sub-community with specific views on fanfiction writing and the meta-text in general (cf. Stein and Busse 198): A *Destiel* fan, for example, whose *Supernatural OTP* is Dean/Castiel, will have little in common with a *Wincest* fan, whose *OTP* is the incestuous relationship of the two brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, as both will watch the meta-text with a completely different focus or read different stories within the archive. While the pattern itself is frequent in all fandoms, particular blends are therefore likely to be

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For further reference, cf. Bauer, *English*; Bauer, "Word Formation"; for a different classification, cf. Kortmann 106-07.

[106] Contrary to some literature on the phenomenon, I do not distinguish between different patterns of truncating words (cf. Bat-El 66) and instead subsume them all under the label of *blend* (Lehrer 591; also cf. Bauer, *English* 234-37).

In addition to *blend*, linguistics sometimes also uses the label *portmanteau* for a "word blending the sounds and combining the meanings of two others" ("Portmanteau Word"; Lehrer 591). More commonly, however, *portmanteau* represents "a type of fusion of two morphemes into one" ("Portmanteau"), and would thus only refer to words such as *took* (*take* + *past tense*) and not to words such as *smog* (*smoke* + *fog*).

restricted to one fandom only, with *Anidala*, *Obidala*, or *Vaderkin* in *Star Wars*, and *Belward* or *Jella* in *Twilight*.

Less common than abbreviations and blends but still popular is redefining the meaning of a word to refer to a wholly new content, or, in more linguistic terms, subjecting it to semantic change (also cf. Clark; Traugott; Bauer, *English* 42-50). While there are not too many different examples, the ones that occur are used extensively across all fandoms, with fans showing particular preference for describing the atmosphere and content of their stories with this type of jargon. Due to the apparent familiarity of words like *lime* or *lemon*, non-fans are especially hampered by encountering these 're-definitions' since the fannish meaning usually has little or no connection with the non-fannish—and thus does not necessarily adhere to the principle that semantic change only results from links in meaning (cf. Traugott 125). As such, a story whose readers are warned of "future lemons" (Valior) does certainly not contain "a yellow citrus fruit that has a sour taste," "a bright yellow color" or "a product that is not made well," as Merriam-Webster would define the lexical meaning of "lemon"; instead, it tells fans to expect extensive sex scenes described in graphic detail, since fannish lore has *lemon* stem from a Japanese slang term with the meaning of 'sexy' and not from the "yellow citrus fruit." Similarly, stories that have "a sprinkle of lime" (JustALovelyRomance) would not suggest the inclusion of slightly less explicit sex scenes to the non-initiated, and neither the terms *shipping/shipper* or *trolling*/*troll* nor *fluff*, *curtain*, *smut*, or *whump* stories share any link to their suggested dictionary meanings, a fact which—in the case of *whump*—may even support categorizing this term as a neologism since Merriam-Webster lists it as merely "imitative" or onomatopoetic.

According to my research, neologisms may well be the least frequent category of coinages, with only very few nonce words entering permanent fannish use (also cf. Lehrer; Clark).[107] Aside from the potential case of *whump*, i.e. stories in which "physical or emotional pain is heaped on a favourite character, often repeatedly and brutally […] for the sheer pleasure of seeing the whumpee battered and bruised" (Moonbeam), *drabble* seems to be the most widespread example: Defined as a story with an exact length of 100

[107] Both Lehrer and Clark have a very broad understanding of neologism, listing several different word formation devices such as compounding, affixation, conversion, acronyms, or blends (Lehrer 590-91) as belonging to this category. For the purpose of my analysis, however, I have chosen a more restricted understanding, which does recognize blends, for instance, as 'new words' but nevertheless considers them as being distinctly different from true neologisms such as *drabble*.

words, the term is not only in itself completely opaque for any non-fan but, to add another layer of complexity, also refers to a genre unique to fanfiction.[108] Apart from that, fans have apparently created hardly any completely new terms since most other neologisms, though not included in dictionaries, can still be considered at least partially transparent since they are coined analogous to regular processes of English word formation. Phrases such as *ficlet*, a 'short (fan)fic,' or *podfic*, a story one can listen to on media devices, are thus more easily accessible to an English-speaking non-fan than many other expressions of fannish jargon.

Belonging to a fifth subcategory of fanspeak, terms adopted from languages other than English represent just such examples of less accessible terminology. Either entering fanfiction with their original meaning or a redefined one, these words symbolize not only the genre's transnational and international character but also the fans' preference for employing terms that help them maintain the linguistic boundary between themselves and others. Accompanied by words from other languages such as German or Greek, Japanese has proven a particularly rich source of many expressions, which have entered the genre via the popular anime fandoms: In their anglicized spelling, terms like *yaoi*, *sho(u)nen ai*, *hentai*, or *kawai* can be found frequently, often in reference to the type of relationships featured in the stories. Although all languages continuously change and affect each other—for example through processes of lexical borrowing (cf. Gottlieb)—, the fact that these non-English terms are restricted to fandom and its specific contexts hinders understanding substantially: A "Slash" relationship that is characterized as "Shounen ai maybe yaoi" (Celestinasong) is not the same as a *lemon* or *lime* slash story, with only a fan able to interpret the subtle differences in the stories so described.

Understanding becomes a particular obstacle with the sixth and last pattern, which is not only very frequent but also very variable and creative in itself: Much of fannish paratext contains what I term *graphic writing*,[109] i.e. phrases or 'word images' that include

[108] Restricted to 100 words, drabbles may be a genre that *can* only work in fanfiction: Due to their extreme brevity that does not allow for extensive descriptions and little to no plot, they need the reader to be familiar with the entire intratextual archive and to have characters, constellations, etc. firmly in mind. Although fanauthors do not always strictly adhere to the limit of 100 words (or 200 in a double-drabble), drabbles are one of the most popular genres on *FanFiction.Net* with close to 140,000 stories.

[109] With the term *graphic writing*, I intend to establish a connection, albeit a very loose one, between this fannish practice and the literary genre of graphic novels that is based on visual representations; moreover, *graphic writing* is meant to imply the linguistic term *ideograph*, i.e. a graphic symbol that indicates a certain larger concept (an example would be Egyptian hieroglyphs).

characters and symbols neither part of the Latin alphabet nor, consequently, of the written representation of English-language words. Whenever fanauthors employ terminology such as *m/m*, *Xover*, *ObiXAni*, or *hurt!Sammy*, they express themselves in a substantially graphic or visual form, with the slash, the cross (via the letter *X*), and the exclamation point utilized to signify a fannish concept without having to spell it out. While the latter of the three is particularly complex and the exclamation point has found a wide variety of purposes in specifying character traits, designating *'verses*, signaling fannish tropes, or indicating character constellations, all kinds of graphic writing condense content to a very high degree and thus are especially difficult to decipher for non-fans.

Nevertheless, it is not only these six modes of jargon formation that makes comprehending fannish paratext rather complicated for anyone outside the linguistic barrier of fanspeak; moreover, my study of several hundreds of stories also shows that fans most often combine several terms in one piece of writing so that a highly heterogeneous text with a mix of patterns emerges. A summary like Wasted Greens's for her story "Truth or Dare" that ends with "Femslash threesome, R/A/B, oneshot, lemon, AH/AU" thus brings together the categories of neologism ("Femslash"), abbreviation/initialism ("R"; "A"; "B"; "AH"; "AU"), graphic writing ("R/A/B"; "AH/AU"), and redefinition ("oneshot"; "lemon") in order to code the contents of her text multi-dimensionally so that only *Twilight*-fanauthors will immediately understand her description: In this story, which has neither a prequel nor a sequel ("oneshot") but includes sex scenes portrayed in detail ("lemon"), the characters of Rose, Alice, and Bella appear as humans in an alternate universe ("AH/AU") and engage in a sexual relationship among the three of them ("Femslash"; "R/A/B"). Apart from featuring different patterns for coinages, however, Wasted Greens's text also indicates the second obstacle for quick and immediate access to fanspeak I have found in my analysis, using terms that represent different levels of dissemination within fanfiction. As briefly indicated before, not all expressions occur fanfiction-wide across all fandoms but many of them are specific to—or at least altered in—certain fandoms, which requires a fan to constantly adapt their language use whenever entering a new community. Wasted Greens's "AH," for instance, is only used in *Twilight*, whereas "lemon" represents a rather popular variant of *slash* and "AU" certainly constitutes one of the most common terms known to every fanauthor.

The only other researcher to have systematically studied fanspeak so far, Claudia Rebaza already recognized in her dissertation "The Modern Coterie" of 2009 that fannish

terminology is not evenly distributed and alike employed/understood by every fanauthor, noting that the phrases used by the members of the *LiveJournal* group she worked with had differing degrees of familiarity in different online spaces. To differentiate the terms, she introduced the notion of jargon as "global action" (66-69) and "localized action" (69-71), applying the former to any kind of fannish jargon that was "imported [to the group] from other fannish spaces such as game sites" (66) and thus not specific to the community she analyzed or even necessarily related to fanfiction; the latter she applied to any kind of jargon that was "used by [her object of study] alone" (71), no matter if it referred to fannish, fanfiction, or *LiveJournal* practices. While using Rebaza's distinction would make only little sense in regard to studying the dissemination of diverse jargon expressions within fanfiction—and her assessment that "abbreviations of romantic character pairings (i.e. S/B, B/A. [sic] S/A/B) or particular types of fanfic (i.e. human AU, vamp!Xander) […] only exist in this group" as "specific terms used by [her object of study] alone" (71) is moreover utterly incorrect since the examples she chose represent some of the most common terms within the entire genre—, I nevertheless consider her introduction of the notions of "global" and "localized" valuable additions to the analysis of fannish language. Deliberately modifying her definition of these labels, however, I here re-define them, first, to refer to *fanspeak only* instead of encompassing any kind of jargon fanauthors may possibly employ as members of *LiveJournal* groups, gamers, or participants of other fan communities or fannish practices; secondly, to account for the abovementioned diversity of fanspeak within this fanfiction context, I re-define "globalized jargon" to be understood as terminology used within *all* of fanfiction and "localized jargon" as terminology specific to a *particular* fandom.[110]

With my study the first to actually discuss the intricacies of fannish jargon per se, it has uncovered that many terms are indeed globalized and accordingly occur very frequently to be both recognized and employed by each and every fanauthor. Unsurprisingly, they often refer to deeply ingrained and widespread concepts of fanfiction, representing the essence of the genre. As such, it is hardly remarkable that *AU* as alternate universe or *slash* constitute highly prominent examples of this general jargon, since they

[110] Acknowledging that my study of three, albeit very large fandoms does not allow for a completely absolutist assessment, I nevertheless base my argumentation on their representativeness, the high number of participating fanauthors, and my own experience as a long-time member of fandom. This does not preclude, however, that localized jargon may occur in limited form outside of its own fandom since fanwriters tend to work in several fandoms, at least consecutively, and may thus transfer terms.

code the transformative approach fanauthors bring to the meta-text. Similarly, *OC*, *OMC*, and *OFC* to signify the introduction of the fanwriter's own (male and female) characters into the archive are globally recognized; *beta* and *r&r* embody the inherently collaborative read and review culture of fanfiction; other terms such as *drabble*, *oneshot*, *Mary Sue*, or *songfic* refer to genuine fannish genres, terms such as *whump, H/C, fluff, schmoop, m-preg, crack*, or *PWP* to fannish tropes and the content and atmosphere of stories. Full of this globalized jargon, paratext like "Anakin always said it was Padme's fault, but he was the one who spotted that broom closet. AU fluff" and "possible crack" (irnan) therefore enables fans of any fandom to gain access to this story; as everyone is familiar with these phrases, such summaries or Author's Notes also embody the threshold function of jargon I discuss in the following subchapter, since they support non-*Star Wars* fanauthors who may not yet have become acquainted with localized *Star Wars* jargon in their transfer to this corner of fanfiction.

What additionally aids fans in this shift from fandom to fandom is the fact that fanspeak does not strictly differentiate between globalized and localized terminology but also features many terms that occupy a decidedly intermediate position in order to facilitate interpretation for fanauthors new to a particular fandom. Quite a large number of expressions seem to be singularly used in an individual community but are actually variants of more general terms, which are adapted to a specific fandom and its needs. Innovatively, fans thus modify fandom-overarching terminology, using established patterns to make them more easily recognizable and understandable all the while the terms in themselves remain characteristic of one community. As such, any fanauthor will be able to infer that a story characterized as "Non-con, Q/O, Drama, AU" (cajolerisms) contains a sexual/romantic relationship as this is signified by the globalized symbol of the slash between two letters ("Q/O") but, if he/she is not a member of the *Star Wars* community, will be unable to find out who the partners in this relationship are, i.e. Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi, whom the fandom commonly abbreviates with the initial letters of their names despite many other characters having a first name that begins with the same letters. As this example already indicates, many of these variations—or phrases of 'transfer jargon'—appear in regard to character names or titles of meta-textual episodes or volumes, so that fanauthors ultimately have to be familiar with the meta-text and its fannish archive to achieve full transparency in one fandom, although their recognition of patterns from global jargon already helps them to achieve partial transparency.

As such, pairings have become particular favorites of being coded in this type of fanspeak, since they rely on the characters of one single fandom while constituting a global feature of fanfiction: Apart from the abovementioned "Q/O" that is modeled after a more general *m/m* to signify two men in a slash relationship, *Star Wars*, for instance, has blends that create *Obidala* from Obi-Wan Kenobi and Padmé Amidala, or graphic writing such as *Anixobi*, in which the *x* as a cross indicates a pairing of Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. While this fandom tends to use these three schemata in rather equal frequency, my research has found that in respect to pairings *Supernatural* uses little graphic writing and *Twilight* much prefers the /-pattern, which in this latter fandom—in contrast to both *Star Wars* and *Supernatural*—is often combined with specifications as to the level of (sexual) detail of the story. Clarifying that her story includes neither *lemon* nor *lime*, i.e. does not contain any description of sex scenes, twigirl3's summary of "no citrus […] S/E B/J to J/L" therefore firmly situates her story within the *Twilight* fandom just by virtue of her specific use of fanspeak. Variations, as her text evidences, thus work on a two-fold level: First, they adapt a global schema such as the /-pattern according to the specific characteristics and characters of the fandom; secondly, they indicate the preferences of a particular community through the frequency in which they occur, especially when there are many different ways of codifying one concept. While *slash*, *m/m*, *yaoi*, or *sho(u)nen ai*, for instance, all refer to the genre of slash and pairings can be indicated via the */*, the *X*, and blends, each fandom has different favorites, which results in a highly uneven distribution of each of these terms in any given community. Variations thus do not only occur in regard to names or analogous features that *need* to be adapted due to the nature of being specific to a fandom but also in regard to fannish concepts that would not necessarily have to be re-named since they are prevalent within the entire genre. Despite these divergent preferences for expressing the same ideas in different fandoms, it nevertheless remains important to recognize that the use of the familiar patterns of globalized jargon all the same supports fanspeak's abovementioned threshold function, as it facilitates interpretation by fans new to a yet unknown fandom and accordingly their rather quick integration into this community.

This transfer becomes far more difficult with the third level of jargon dissemination, i.e. the presence of localized jargon that is specific to one fandom only and there codifies unique concepts in unique terminology so as to considerably obstruct understanding for any non-member. Far less widespread than both globalized jargon and

its variations, terms like *Twilight*'s *AH*, *BPOV*, or *Imprint*, *Supernatural*'s *wee!chesters*, *Wincest*, or *Kripke'd*, and *Star Wars*'s *BBY*, *ABY*, *Fab Four*, or *Vaderkin* present an obstacle only more thorough immersion into the respective fandom can overcome. Often examples of particular creativity, many of these expressions condense elaborate fannish concepts into a few letters or a word image, which frequently makes them difficult to decipher without any intimate knowledge of the fandom or without lengthy explanations: *Vaderkin*, for example, refers to the character of Darth Vader, who used to be Anakin Skywalker before his decision to embrace the dark side of the force in *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (USA; 2005); apart from this rather factual and meta-text-based description, however, *Vaderkin* also indicates the entire process of Skywalker's transformation as conceptualized in the fanon, and, which is significant for fanfiction as an archontic genre, also references the characters influencing and influenced by his choice. In short, pun intended, *Vaderkin* serves as a fannish narrative shortcut to much of the archive that neither the evocation of Vader or Skywalker nor a more lengthy reference to *Episode III* could achieve. Although represented by only few terms in each fandom, localized jargon therefore constitutes one of the most significant ways of fannish communication since it enables fans to articulate complex concepts and so majorly contributes to establishing fandom as "some kind of exclusive club that you can't really be in unless you know all the words" (Anthony J. "Doppelgänger" Shepherd).

Never analyzed or even described in any previous scholarship on fanfiction, this complexity of fanspeak already speaks for itself in regard to the issues at the heart of this chapter: Only due its difficulties can jargon assume the important role in community-building and the affirmation of fannish expertise which, as I argue in the following, are among the backbones of the fannish claim to agency, authority, and power. As my study points out, fanspeak presents itself as immensely heterogeneous, creative and multi-faceted: Abbreviations, blends, re-definitions, neologisms, non-English words, and graphic writing testify to fans using at least six different schemata for jargon formation, with the emerging phrases disseminated over the three different levels of specific communities, several fandoms in form of variations, or the entire genre. As fans freely combine expressions, no matter their distribution or formation pattern, stories that are coded "M for language/lemons! Mostly Dean/OFC, Some Sam/OFC, No Wincest!" (PinkRULES453) thus function as a particularly viable illustration of the fannish use of jargon: Localized jargon such as the blend "Wincest" proves thefourthvine's statement

that fans who inhabit "different neck[s] of fandom" may experience "fannish language disconnects," whereas globalized jargon such as the initialisms "OFC" and "M" and variations such as the redefinition "lemons" and the /-pattern as an example of graphic writing indicate a way to overcome those very "language disconnects" for fanauthors who may be new to the *Supernatural* fandom. Nevertheless, any of these terms remains very much inaccessible for non-fanauthors, demonstrating to them specifically that there is indeed, as thefourthvine also concludes, a "fannish jargon barrier" that firmly separates insiders from outsiders.

So aptly described by Hellekson in her statement on fannish jargon that "[t]o the uninitiated outsider, media fandom as it's currently practiced online […] makes little sense" (113), this barrier also looms large in discussion among fans, who verify its existence in numerous accounts that firmly acknowledge and corroborate fanspeak's function as a boundary. Despite the fact that jargon is almost as fervently discussed and disputed among fanauthors as Author's Notes, Susan M.M, for example, thus confirms in a *FanFiction.Net* forum on "Jargon and Gobbledygook" that fandom may "spea[k] a common language, but it has many dialects" so that "[w]ords and phrases that some of us take for granted are completely incomprehensible to others." Similarly, Moonbeam affirms that "there's something of a unique vocabulary to our trade that may necessitate a period of orientation," which leads another fan to explain that, "[y]ou can always tell a newbie because they do not speak properly, they have not figured out how to speak whatever the fandom is" (qtd. in Rebaza 73). Fans know that there are "lots of terms in fanfiction that can get confusing" (Megan Freeman); nevertheless, they firmly insist that newcomers adopt their own fannish language: Speaking "properly" thus becomes a must, since "we expect newbies who come to fandom to learn our fannish jargon and mores" (zvi_likes_tv).[111]

[111] The term *newbie* also features in Moonbeam's fanspeak glossary, where she explains that it "refers to a fan, author or reader, who is relatively new to the fandom (or the concept of fandom in general) and does not yet know all of the ways of the fandom. Newbies can, due to their lack of knowledge, make mistakes in interacting with other established fans that can be glaringly obvious […] However, given time and patience they will eventually learn and adapt. This glossary in particular was designed specifically to help newbies familiarize themselves with the language of fandom so that they might more quickly be assimilated into the […] community." Particularly focusing on the "mistakes" newbies make "due to their lack of knowledge," Moonbeam stresses in her definition that it will take them considerable "time and patience" to learn fanspeak, which re-enforces the notion of the "language of fandom" as a barrier that cannot be overcome easily.

Regardless of this quasi uniformity of opinion, there remain some voices that argue against using (too much) fanspeak, although these fans seem to exert little influence on the actual practice of writing stories as accessing the texts of any fandom on *FF.Net* will easily illustrate. All the same, Anthony J. "Doppelgänger" Shepherd, for instance, calls fanspeak "bloody awful" due to its exclusive nature, and metamiri asks if the mass of fanspeak has caused fandom to "mov[e] from an open-enrollment system to something else." Basing their criticism on summaries such as Asariel Luna's for "New Kids on The Block" that concludes an "RP with a friend" with "AU!Verse HighSchool!Winchesters Teen!Chesters OOC's & OFC's," these fans worry whether the boundary jargon constitutes is slowly obliterating its threshold function, deterring fans from coming to fanfiction or transferring between fandoms—a concern that the ever increasing numbers of stories and writers nevertheless seem to be proving unfounded. Altogether, however, fannish disapproval of jargon remains rather few and far in between, and, despite some fans' objections, the profuse usage of fanspeak invariably necessitates that "newcomers […] must learn the terms" for them to be able "to participate and become members of the group" (Rebaza 72).

Becoming a full-fledged member of fandom, Rebaza rightly acknowledges, depends on the firm knowledge of fanspeak, which accordingly acquires a vital role in fannish community-building due to its function as a salient cultural marker. In consequence, the boundary it establishes between those who belong and those who do not needs to be recognized as a major factor in the struggle for fannish agency, which is inherently connected to establishing a strong community and the fans' identity as experts—in short, to fanspeak. While language in itself has always shared a close link to issues of power (cf., for example, Wright 21; Tannen 150-52), I therefore claim that it is specifically the heterogeneity and complexity of jargon which constitutes fandom as a powerful agent in the relationship between the producers and the fanauthors, since these aspects are the ones that allow the fans, first, to utilize fanspeak as a viable barrier and, secondly, to prove their expertise and knowledge. In reference to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "linguistic capital" (646),[112] a term he coined with recourse to his more popular concept

[112] Bourdieu argues that while language is foremost "made for communication," i.e. "for understanding, deciphering" (646), no one speaks "only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (648). Language thus also entails the "capacity to command a listener," which turns it into "authoritative language" (648) that becomes a person's "linguistic capital" (646) in a specific communicative situation since 'commanding' presupposes that both the respective speaker and his/her

of economic capital, I thus argue that scholarship on fanspeak, which has almost exclusively noted its incomprehensibility for non-fans (cf. Hellekson 113-14; Merrick; Marx 10), needs to "replac[e] the question of the *meaning* of speech with the question of the *value* and *power* of speech" (646). Supporting—or, maybe even enabling—fans to form powerful, cohesive, and opaque communities and to establish themselves as experts superior to the producers, fannish jargon accordingly comprises a particularly salient example of Bourdieu's assessment of language as an "instrument of action" (645) and as an "instrument of power" (648).

To substantiate this notion of fanspeak as an "instrument of power," I analyzed several hundred paratexts from stories from the *Supernatural*, *Twilight*, and *Star Wars* fandoms, using an approach similar to that I employed in regard to Author's Notes, i.e. my focus lay on the cultural function of fanspeak and its patterns. Even my very first findings suggested a considerably greater complexity of jargon than any other study had previously acknowledged, let alone thoroughly illustrated. Moreover, it soon became evident that fanspeak constitutes far more than a mere linguistic feature within the genre but that it serves as a specific fannish strategy of appropriation, whose use again follows larger patterns that are familiar to fanauthors from all (three) fandoms. Fanwriters, I thus conclude on the basis of my research, utilize fanspeak as an overt means of demonstrating their agency and authority, working with a two-fold approach that is based, first, on the link between language and community and, secondly, the link between language and expertise. Via jargon, fans therefore strategically accrue "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu 646) that they use to redefine their role in the media industry—via language, they become agents who are empowered to participate and shape processes of production.

In order to corroborate my claims, the first subchapter in this part of my dissertation accordingly focuses on the role of jargon in fannish community-building: Here, I point out that the existence of a community of fans depends to a significant degree on their own language, since it establishes an overt boundary that signifies membership and cohesion—that is, fanspeak becomes a defining feature of a community that has few other opportunities to establish a boundary due to the inherent openness and democratic set-up of the genre. As such, it constitutes a vital part of fans' ability to reframe themselves as the democratizing force of "we, the fans," since it contributes to creating

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utterance are worth being listened to—and thus have power over the person listening (648). As such, language certainly becomes an "instrument of action" and "power" (645).

this “we” which ultimately allows fanauthors to influence the structure of the media industry and their position in it. In addition, the second part of this chapter discusses the role of jargon in establishing the expertise of fans as fans, fanauthors, and producers both within their own community and, more significantly, outside of the borders of their own community. Followed by a brief conclusion, it illustrates how fans strategically use fanspeak to portray themselves as professionals who are not only equal but possibly even superior to the producers, which allows them to actively redefine their status of passive consumers and amateurs, even in the larger framework of the production of the meta-text. In the end, as Kenneth Burke maintains, “we humans […] like to exercise our prowess with symbol systems, just because that’s the kind of animal we are” (29). Just such a symbol system, fannish jargon accordingly becomes a powerful strategy of showing fannish “prowess”—of showing that “we, the fans” just ‘know best.’

3.3.1 The Power of the Masses: Fannish Jargon as a Strategy of Community-Building

"Jargon," writes Keith Allan in his definition of this linguistic category, "has two functions"; apart from constituting a "specialist language," it is meant to "promote in-group solidarity, and to exclude as out-groupers those people who do not use the jargon" (110). Fanspeak, as Karen Hellekson confirms in her brief study of fanfiction conventions, serves this purpose of excluding Allan's "out-groupers" to the point, since she concludes that the genre's "off-putting jargon and the unspoken rules mea[n] that only *this* group of *that* people can negotiate the terrain" (113). Clearly, "*this* group of *that* people," i.e. fanauthors, delineate themselves sharply from others, i.e. all non-fanauthors, whose group also encompasses (most of) the producers of the meta-text,[113] who have always been regarded as fandom's "external enemies" (Shirky, "Group"; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 121) due to their repeated attempts to prohibit or strictly regulate fanfiction and other fan activities.[114] As I have demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter, the heterogeneity of fanspeak makes it fairly impossible for a non-member—be that a non-fan, a non-fanauthor, or a non-fanauthor of a specific community—to interpret summaries like NightSwordSW's, Marianna Morgan's, or 22blue's. With Allan's and Hellekson's words in mind, I accordingly argue that fans who codify their writing along the lines of "A collection of Dean!hurts. Ch 9: E/O Challenge: cool. A little bit of Dean!whump with a side of Steady!Sam" (Enkidu07) engage in overt community-building through acts of exclusion and inclusion: In restricting access to their texts for non-fans while simultaneously enabling their fellow fans to easily understand their writing, they construe

[113] Although this group of non-fanauthors includes the producers often in a merely symbolic way, the creators of the meta-text have recently also made some first attempts to enter fandom, which incorporates them into the de facto audience of non-fanauthors. As I discuss in the course of this subchapter (and in particular in chapter 4 that deals with *Supernatural*), most of these forays have remained superficial and thus confirm the producers' status as "external enemies" (Shirky, "Group"; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 121), while others have actually committed to fandom and have thus bridged the gap between fans and non-fans. As such, the creators of such texts, in particular of *Supernatural*, acquire a special status in the binary so important in this context, "the *us* versus *them*, the fan versus the nonfan" (Hellekson 114).

[114] Not only have authors like Anne Rice, George R.R. Martin, or Diana Gabaldon tried to stop fanfiction via appeals to their fanbase to "not write it" (Gabaldon) as I indicate in chapter 3.2.2, but the decades of fanfiction writing have also seen repeated attempts from various copyright owners to regulate the genre: Lucasfilm, for instance, sought to limit "certain types of fan activity" since the company is "primarily motivated by a desire to enforce its storytelling primacy" (F. Phillips); in another example, J.K. Rowling wants her fans to refrain from writing "obscene" material since the books are "aimed at young children" and "[i]f young children were to stumble on Harry Potter in a [sic] an x-rated story, that would be a problem" (Waters).

an explicit boundary between an *us* and a *them*; they strategically use their own jargon as one of the most vital elements of community-building.[115]

"By definition," asserts Anthony P. Cohen in his work *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, "the boundary marks the beginning and end of a community" (12). Its two sides—'in' and 'out'—provide a clear demarcation for membership and non-membership, which has him claim that the boundary "encapsulates the identity of the community" (12) unlike any other quality since a community is inherently characterized by the issue of belonging, or conversely, by not-belonging. Corroborating Cohen's contention, David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis recognize membership as one of the four defining features of a community (9-14), thereby expressly maintaining that "membership has *boundaries*; this means that there are people who belong and people who do not" (9). Apart from identifying "influence," "integration and fulfillment of needs," and "shared emotional connection" (11-14) as integral parts of communal identity, they specifically emphasize the power of boundaries in community-building, which they understand to be the most salient factor in establishing the indispensable "*sense of belonging*" (10) among the community members. The "fact of *membership* is the essential thing," linguist John E. Joseph concludes in his research on identity and language, and not so much the "nature of the group itself" (488).

Vital in any community, this "feeling of belonging, of being a part" (McMillan and Chavis 9) acquires major significance in fannish online communities, which, as Siddhartha Mennon discusses (345-49), may not share all characteristics of offline communities but are nevertheless just as "real and legitimate" (345) because of their communal rituals and conventions and, in particular, because of their "*virtual togetherness*" (346). Nevertheless, their predominantly online interaction[116] entails that fanauthors, unlike members of non-

[115] This boundary, I show in the following, has three major functions integral to constructing the community of fanauthors: While it is primarily directed to the outside, i.e. guards fandom from intrusion from non-fans through its exclusionary potential and allows fans to immediately police non-usage or wrong usage of jargon, fanspeak also serves as a salient proof of membership within the fannish community so as to create cohesion among its members. Moreover, 'learning jargon' also functions as a way of 'learning membership,' which has the fannish language provide a distinct threshold new fanauthors/fanauthors from different fandoms can use to enter a community if they invest the time and effort it requires to understand and employ it.

[116] Before today's digital age, fannish communities, of course, were just as offline as other communities (for a study of these, cf., for example, Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*). Apart from offline friendships among fans and fan conventions where fanauthors can meet face to face, contemporary fanfiction writing, however, takes place in virtual spaces so that my line of

Internet-based communities, cannot establish their membership via a common cultural background, geographical proximity, or joint identity features such as nationality, age, class, gender, or ethnicity—factors which tend to typify and bind together offline communities. Instead of defining membership and its boundaries by way of "shared abstract characteristics […] or simple copresence" (Eckert 683), the fannish virtual community, interpretive community, imagined community, or—what may be another concept to grasp fandom—the fannish community of practice (cf. Lave and Wenger; Wenger; Eckert)[117] thus needs to rely on other markers of belonging/not-belonging—an essential one of which, I argue, is language use.

While other concepts such as Stanley Fish's of the interpretive community have their own specific relevance in regard to fanfiction writing, it is in particular Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's idea of the community of practice that becomes useful when thinking about the fannish construction of their community, its membership, and its boundaries. Originally developed in the context of a social theory of learning, Lave and Wenger define a community of practice as *not* involving "co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries" (98); instead the model is meant to "imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what this means for their lives and for their communities" (98). In the words of Penelope Eckert, a community of practice accordingly refers to a "collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common

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argumentation presupposes fanfiction as an online practice. Nevertheless, since even earlier offline fan communities predominantly defined membership via the practice of fanfiction writing and adherence to its conventions (as I show in the following paragraphs for online communities), my reasoning also applies in some degree to those non-virtual communities.

[117] While fandom has been convincingly established as a community in numerous publications, not least because of the "fans' own understanding of themselves as a 'community'" (Merrick), scholars harbor no uniform view of the *kind* of community fanauthors represent. Along with many others, Busse, for example, draws on Fish's concept of the interpretive community with his focus on community members "shar[ing] interpretative strategies" (Fish qtd. in "Return" 57; also cf. Felschow; Gray, *Show* 32-33; Lindlof, Coyle, and Grodin; Kaplan 150-51; Jenkins, "'Strangers'"). In contrast, only Rebaza has yet made use of Lave and Wenger's concept of the community of practice, which she convincingly applies to fandom (49-83) so as to inform my own understanding of the online community of fanauthors. She underlines that this "framework presumes that the group as a whole creates an output [i.e. fanfiction] to which various different social interactions and tasks contribute" and that here "knowledge is a matter of competence over particular tasks, and that the group cannot exist without participation and active engagement" (52). What I find additionally appealing other than her emphasis on the *practice* of fanfiction writing and participation is the fact that the community of practice's focus on a "common endeavor" (Eckert 683) it resemble the notion of a fannish affinity space (cf. R. Black, "Digital Design" 117; R. Black, *Adolescents* 36-42) that sees the love for the object of fandom as the one common denominator among fans regardless of their individual, often very diverse backgrounds.

endeavor" (683), which then serves as the community's defining feature and as the one that establishes a connection between all its participants, regardless of their diversity in other respects. Applied to fanfiction, this means that the practice of fanfiction writing about which fanauthors "share understandings concerning what they are doing" becomes the crucial factor in constituting membership and its corresponding boundaries; or, put more succinctly, whoever writes fanfiction according the genre's conventions is a member.

Nevertheless, already Lave and Wenger ascertain that the "common endeavor" and the associated "understandings" do not fully suffice for participants to acquire the "right to belong" (McMillan and Chavis 9): In addition, the two scholars identify language as an essential and salient marker of membership (105-09), since they found not only that different communities of practice were characterized by different ways of talking but that the "notion of 'proper speech' is so clearly crystallized in the collective expectations of the community" (106) that it serves as a "display of membership by virtue of fulfilling a crucial function in the shared practice" (109). Repeatedly, Lave and Wenger insist that membership "involves learning how to talk" (105, 109) like one's fellow participants, emphasizing the importance of acquiring the community's vocabulary and communicative style in the course of the transition from non-member status to member status. As such, communities of practice have over time come to be defined not only by shared "participation in an activity system" (Lave and Wenger 98) but also by a shared language that inherently contributes to the identity of the group (also cf. Eckert; Joseph 488-89).

A shared language that signifies a common communicative behavior and simultaneously provides the boundary essential for membership, fanspeak, I claim accordingly, constitutes one of the most significant features of the fannish community of practice. Notwithstanding its function as a possible threshold for new members discussed later, its heterogeneity and complexity create a firm dichotomy between members and non-members, so that truly "only *this* group of *that* people can negotiate the terrain" (Hellekson 113). Thousands of fan-texts that resemble silvermoonstini's "BDSM, Bi, Bond, D/s, Dom, […], H/C, Oneshot, SoloM, Yaoi" generate diametrically opposed experiences for the two groups—the fans can interpret her writing, gain access to her story, and even use similar terminology in their feedback; the non-fans are excluded from understanding and remain outsiders without a chance to participate in the collaborative dialogue of fanfiction. Inherently, fanspeak is therefore linked to activity and agency,

which has it constitute an essential component of fannish power and authority: Those who employ and comprehend it can take part in the continuous production of the archive, while the others need to remain passive and cannot inscribe their own voice into the fictional universe. As such, mastery of jargon serves as an immensely empowering experience for fans since every encounter with its terms translates into an affirmation of both agency in regard to the enlargement of the archive and membership within the community of fanauthors—an affirmation that repeats itself with each new encounter of fannish terminology in a permanent feedback loop.

In fandom, the boundary of jargon therefore acquires extensive meaning in differentiating between the active and the passive, between the powerful and the powerless. By establishing a link between mastery of jargon and participation/power/agency, fans ascribe themselves a new status that reassigns the traditional distribution of roles within the media industry: Comprehending fanspeak here becomes synonymous with producing, not doing so with idleness and stagnation. Jargon thus creates a dichotomy in regard to issues of power and authority that gives additional meaning and significance to the boundary between membership and non-membership via circular reference: Being a member means understanding fanspeak, understanding fanspeak means activity and participation, activity and participation mean power, power means being a member. More than a simple signal of inclusion/exclusion, as Allan (110), Fahey (4-6), P. Burke (14) and others write in reference to jargon, the fannish language distinctly connects these two conditions to questions of agency and authority via the aspect of participation so that it becomes immediately clear that fans—as members—claim power and, conversely, non-fans—as non-members—have no claim to power at all.

Membership, as can be seen here, has tremendous significance in fandom and the fannish community defines itself precisely through the very barrier scholars have recognized as constitutive for community-building (Cohen 11-15; Wenger 103-21; McMillan and Chavis 9-11). While on a first glance fanfiction seems to be "open to anyone with Internet access" (Rebaza 29), jargon represents an excellent example of the at times formidable obstacles which make entering the fannish community difficult for anyone not willing to truly engage with fandom: While fanspeak also constitutes a point of entry for potential new members, it is not an easy one to commit to, prompting fans like Victoria P. to speak of fandom as "*la cosa nostra*," i.e. "this thing of ours." While tongue in cheek, her essay on *The FanFic Symposium* compares fandom explicitly to the "mafia

family," stressing the resemblance in the boundary between insiders and outsiders she recognizes to exist both in the mafia and in fandom: According to her, "*omertá*," i.e. "the code of silence of the mafia family" that stipulates to "[*n*]*ever let anyone outside the family know*," constitutes one of the "most stringent rules of fandom"—and fanspeak, which appears as "[u]nintellegible, debased, barbarous" (Fahey 4) talk for everyone "*outside the family*," quasi embodies "*omertá*" unlike any other quality of fanfiction writing. Via its previously documented complexity and heterogeneity, fanspeak permits fanauthors to establish this boundary both scholars and fans consider crucial, providing an obstacle that impedes immediate access and facilitates guarding the community of fans, its texts, and conversations.

Composing texts like "Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics Destiel" (NatalieFinchNightingale), which have nothing at all to do with the Greek alphabet but specify a story's character constellation, fans thus utilize their terminology in the form of a powerful strategy of inclusion and exclusion, as a clear proof or disproof of membership: Their writing establishes a binary of comprehensibility vs. incomprehensibility, which separates fanauthors from non-fanauthors to the intention of construing the latter as passive and powerless. With this purpose in mind, I have found in my study that the boundary of fanspeak is also intentionally directed at the producers, whose non-use or faulty use of jargon explicitly defines them as outsiders—as non-members, non-participants, and non-agents. As fandom's long-time antagonists, the creators of the meta-text are therefore—both symbolically and de facto—a major focus of the fannish language barrier, which prevents them from easily entering fandom, understanding its language, and from gaining (additional) power through this act. Fanspeak is after all meant to be intelligible for "*this* group of *that* people" (Hellekson 113) only, excluding *all* non-fanauthors who do not spend the required "three [to] six months" (LaChev 90) to cross the threshold its terminology also offers. Despite the status of the producers outside the fannish world and their power as the allegedly only legitimate "storytellers,"[118] they are

[118] "*We* are the storytellers," asserts, for instance, producer and writer David Kemper (qtd. in Ross 248), and executive producer David Eick concludes that ultimately, no matter what fans do, "they really want you to tell them a story" (qtd. in Ross 249; also cf. chapter 1). Along with other examples of authors insisting on their "interpretive authority" (Busse, "Ghost"), both quotes demonstrate the persistence of the traditional binary between activity and passivity, producer and consumer, which fanfiction has sought to dissolve based on the fact that storytelling is "basic human nature, it's something that's gone on for thousands of years"; the only thing that has "shifted is that we now have corporations who believe they can own those heroes lock, stock and barrel, and prevent anyone else from telling their stories" (Jenkins, Interview).

thus relegated to the very same outsider position as any other human being, regardless if they are George Lucas, founder of Lucasfilm, creator of the *Star Wars* franchise, or any teenage girl or boy who randomly encounters fanfiction online. Jargon with its wealth of unfamiliar terminology has therefore an equalizing function that keeps everyone powerless and passive who is not a member; previous status does no longer count but any kind of non-fan remains an outsider, since, without exceptions, jargon represents the only "accepted and expected way of discussing texts" (Wright 21) in fandom: Its use constitutes the sole normative behavior according to the community's rules and "standards of behavior [which] will be maintained against internal and external breaches" (Rebaza 142).

Frequently appearing in particularly prominent spaces such as summaries, where it can considerably impede access to the stories,[119] fanspeak accordingly enables fans to close off their communities against producers who foremost seek to demonstrate their alleged proximity to fandom instead of establishing true intimacy and interaction—in short, it allows fans to define some meta-textual creators as true outsiders[120] and others as potential 'members,' whose efforts in surmounting the barrier of jargon have made them occupy an intermediate position in the "*us* versus *them*" (Hellekson 114)—who may not be fans yet but no longer non-fans: While in light of recent developments in "tele-participation," i.e. strategies of audience involvement with which producers seek to "maintain economic power in the face of the Internet as a threat to television's viability as the primary storyteller in US culture" (Ross 262), endeavors from the side of the producers to enter fandom are no longer completely uncommon (cf. Ross; Jenkins, Ford, and Green), their use of jargon immediately reveals if they merely instrumentalize fandom for their own (commercial) purposes or if they have indeed invested the time to become close to fandom, to engage with the fanauthors, and to participate. Recent examples of producers crossing the fannish language barrier by using fanspeak terminology in interviews and similar publications thus distinctly illustrate the function of fannish jargon

[119] The structure of most fanfiction websites only provides immediate view of the summary while the story is usually hidden behind a link. Without understanding the summary, a reader would thus be unlikely to read the story at all.

[120] Through this exclusionary potential, fanspeak might also be said to acquire a dystopian dimension in the style of George Orwell's "Newspeak" that is meant to replace "Oldspeak" (i.e. the language of the people) by governmental orders in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*/*1984*. Nevertheless, as I show in the following, fanspeak is foremost a language that facilitates understanding between fans from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and may therefore be seen as a lingua franca that *con*nects rather than *dis*connects.

as a viable boundary that separates true outsiders/'non-fans' among the producers from those who are interested.

Belonging to the former, the cast of the TV show *NCIS* (USA; 2003-), for example, regularly employs fannish blends like the popular "Tiva" (for the pairing of Tony and Ziva) and "McGoney" (Willman 24), but the fact that the latter is not only a misspelling of *McGony but also constitutes a wrong term for the pairing of McGee and Tony DiNozzo, which fandom has as *McNozzo*, visibly illustrates their superficial engagement with fandom. Their refusal to truly immerse themselves into fandom was accordingly met with rather fierce disapproval on part of the fans, who were quick to detect the ruse their reference to fanspeak represents. Conversely, Zubernis and Larsen recount, for example, a meet and greet of *Supernatural* actor Jensen Ackles with his fans, in which he played with a popular fanspeak term and "fans [were] impressed with his knowledge of fannish parlance" ("Jensen Ackles"); similarly, whenever the show's supporting actor Jim Beaver mentions his knowledge not only of slash but of its correct terminology such as *Wincest*, fannish reaction is consistently positive (Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 120-26). Clearly, the cast of *Supernatural* has committed themselves to 'learning membership' in fandom and engaged with its community and its practices so as to pave the way for a more intimate and more participatory relation between the show's fanbase and its creative team. Based on these examples from two contemporary TV shows, fanspeak ultimately proves to be an important measure of the quality of producers' devotion to fandom, enabling fans to clearly differentiate between those whose engagement with fans remains on an inherently superficial level and those who commit to the communities to a more intense degree to overcome the barrier of fannish jargon and use it as a threshold to the fanauthors.

Explicitly, both fanauthors and scholars therefore recognize the significance jargon has acquired within the fannish community: Via fanspeak, fanauthors visualize the notion that fandom is an "exclusive club" (Anthony J. "Doppelgänger" Shepherd), which no one, be they producers or other non-fans, can easily get into. As such, my research has shown that fanwriters do not only use their own terminology as one of the many norms that are constitutive of any community (McMillan and Chavis 11-15; also cf. Baym 22-24; Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Rerun" 54) but specifically employ it as a strategy to reinforce boundaries that may in in our digital age no longer be as "sharply defined" (Goldstein and Machor xxv) as they used to be in offline, i.e. more spatially determined communities. In

contrast to less immediately obvious conventions such as "the ways in which disputes are resolved" (Rebaza 137), the "aesthetics of fan fiction" (Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* 81), or "certain 'articles of faith' about the definition of good fanfiction and good writing" (Busse, "Ghost"), jargon is accentuated, frequent, and explicit. In this way, it permits fans to strategically place it as an obstacle to outsiders, force prospective fanauthors to deal with it (and thus to learn it if they want to become accepted members), and instrumentalize it as a visible—and very much present—boundary. In any reading that either focuses on its ex- or inclusionary function as a boundary or, as the examples of the *Supernatural* actors illustrate in case of the producers, as a threshold to 'learn membership,' fanspeak accordingly constitutes an inherently integral component of community-building—it serves as a central component of the "sense of community" McMillan and Chavis define as a community's core characteristic (6).

In this way, fanspeak consequently acquires additional significance apart from its function as a boundary that *ex*cludes. Dependent on the "three [to] six months" (LaChev 90) full comprehension takes, its complexity enables the fannish language to serve another, just as important purpose that uses its exclusionary potential to define who is *in*cluded: According to numerous fannish voices, mastery of fanspeak equals proof of membership, since fans repeatedly emphasize that "[y]ou can always tell a newbie because they do not speak properly, they have not figured out how to speak whatever the fandom is. They also have not figured out etiquette" (an anonymous fan qtd. in Rebaza 73). Apart from appropriate behavior in general, speaking "properly" is here singled out as a means to immediately recognize a "newbie," i.e. a novice in fandom, who has not yet spent the necessary time among other fanauthors to obtain the required knowledge. Just like non-use or wrong use defines outsiders, correct use defines insiders, and the mere fact of the former's inability to employ terminology according to the customs of fandom denies them any agency. Again, language in itself serves as a source of empowerment, since its use equals membership equals participation—and participation comprises the basis all fannish power rests upon.

More than just a single one-dimensional boundary between fans and non-fans, fanspeak thus also differentiates between long-time fans and newcomers that "must learn the terms […] in order to participate and become members of the group" (Rebaza 72). *Newbies* cannot simply post a story and automatically expect to be well-received into the fannish community but fandom requires them to demonstrate the will and persistence to

acquire the proper fannish language and behavior in order to become a fully accepted member. Explicitly, fans time and again emphasize that deciphering their code has a central role in fanfiction and is not considered optional: "[W]e," declares zvi_likes_tv, "*expect* newbies who come to fandom to learn our fannish jargon and mores" (my emphasis). Vocalizing the attitude of the "we" of the fannish community, zvi_likes_tv on the one hand overtly declares the rules for participation and, on the other, identifies as a long-time member herself, as part of this "we"—she affirms jargon's multiple purposes in regard to processes of inclusion and exclusion, while she also indicates its potential of enabling "newbies" to "come to fandom." In the end, immediately comprehending and using strings of fanspeak such as "H/L, L/M, OCs, CCs" in Jedi Master Misty Sman-Esay's story "Keeping the Light Burning" represent salient confirmation of the individual fan's membership status without requiring further inquiry into her fan-ography; Jedi Master Misty Sman-Esay's summary full of fanspeak terms makes looking up her profile page with information about the 84 stories authored in eight different fandoms decidedly unnecessary.

Mastering the fannish language is therefore a crucial part of the learning process of new members, and although both non-fans and potential newcomers face the same lack of knowledge and encounter jargon as a "clear boundary separating insiders from outsiders," fanspeak does not only constitute an unattainable proof of membership but, as Rebaza rightly goes on to say, "language acquisition" also functions as a"rite of passage" (72) that in the end can lead to membership status. While the boundary of fanspeak does not allow for 'sneaking in' without understanding or employing it due to the frequency of its terminology, it can nevertheless be re-functionalized to become a threshold for future members—or as a means to identify 'fannish' producers as in the case of *Supernatural*. Even though fans make clear that "trying to work on fan fiction without inside experiences is […] hardly advisable" (LaChev 90), newcomers who invest time and effort in learning fanspeak are rewarded with, first, an individual sense of achievement when encountering a now familiar term, and secondly, quicker acceptance by other fanwriters when using this term in a story of one's own. What is more, this empowerment resulting from this progressive integration can be repeated with each and every encounter, making the acquisition of jargon in fandom a gratifying experience. "If you even have some knowledge […] then you're not really an outsider," writes metamiri, affirming the potential of fanspeak to serve as a threshold to the inside.

Accordingly, if a new fan demonstrates even some degree of interest in becoming a member, fandom has numerous means at its disposal to help and support necomers despite the fact that they are hardly ever formally initiated into the community (cf. Tushnet, "Copyright" 63-64; Rebaza 73).[121] Not only will fans gladly answer reviewers' questions in their Author's Notes, but newcomers can also make use of the various spaces that fanauthors offer for just this purpose: A popular resource, glossaries to fannish terminology, for instance, help *newbies* with acquiring fanspeak, and their sometimes fairly impressive and extensive lists of terms—such as *Fanlore*'s with about 1,300 individual entries—are proof of the considerable effort the community invests in collecting, updating, and explaining, i.e. in constructing jargon as a permeable boundary for potential members, whose openness underscores the genre's democratic potential. Moreover, forums such as *FanFiction.Net*'s "General: FFN Slang" or "Fanfiction Terminology, Labels, and Reviewer Etiqu" [sic] establish contact between long-time fans and new fans in order to provide advice and facilitate integration. Subtitled "Don't know why someone's calling your character a 'Mary-Sue,' 'OOC' or what a 'Slash' fic is before you open it?," the latter forum, for instance, expressly invites fans to "[r]ead and discuss terminology." Questions as to the meaning of specific phrases are usually answered quickly and expertly, which leads to astounded inquiries of new fans as to "[h]ow do you guys know all of this?" (macmoosie, 14 Aug. 2007). The fanauthors' response of "we've all been on here a while" (Omnipotent One Envy) again testifies to the inherent connection between membership and knowledge of jargon.[122]

The various means of support fandom has established therefore testify to fanspeak's potential to serve as a threshold that ensures the constant influx of new and, considering the time frame of "three [to] six months" mentioned above, interested members. As with the dialogic genre of fanfiction in general, interaction becomes the key issue in jargon acquisition: The complexity of its terms requires a certain learning process that relies on the communication between different groups, i.e. between new and

[121] This was certainly different in the fanzine age when the number of fans was still considerably smaller, the circles of distribution much more narrow, and many fanauthors used to know each other personally. As Bacon-Smith describes in *Enterprising Women*, back then new fans usually entered the community via mutual acquaintances (81-141).

[122] The discussion I quote from here also reinforces the function of jargon as a boundary that is not easily penetrable for outsiders: Asking fellow fans for help on the forum, macmoosie concedes that "I tried Google before and couldn't find anything" (31 Dec. 2009), which prompts a quick response by VOCA-on22, stating that "ah, google sucks for those kinds of searches."

experienced fanauthors, whose contact with each other facilitates the creation of a sense of cohesiveness, of a "sense of community" (McMillan and Chavis 6) among members otherwise scattered all across the globe. In the end, it is the very help and support newcomers receive in their transition from non-fan to fan that have fanwriters like BBCullen create a "guide to Fanfiction Slang/Language" in order to provide advice for other newbies since, "I mean at first I was like What the hell??" in the face of the foreign expressions; nevertheless, she acknowledges that, "about a year or more later," the help of others allows her, first, to say that "I know what most if not all of it means now" and, secondly, to pass on her knowledge in the form of a glossary.

Statements like these show that language represents an instrumental means of creating cohesion among the community members: Fanauthors who have passed the first stage of initiation with the help of other fans in turn transfer their expertise to a new set of members, establishing a "shared community of knowledge" (Sanders 45) that includes all fanwriters. In addition to other means of being acknowledged as a member—such as receiving reviews to posted stories—, fanspeak thus fosters the "*sense of belonging and identification*" that McMillan and Chavis emphasize as a major factor in the internal cohesiveness of communities since it "involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group" (10). Apart from this emotional aspect, the two researchers also highlight the role of "[*p*]*ersonal investment*" as an "important contributor to a person's feeling of group membership and to his or her sense of community" (10), which fans who have undergone the lengthy process of jargon acquisition time and again confirm when they mention that the terms are so "damn confusing" and that they have invested "a year or more" (BBCullen) to learn them—but in the end then also assert that their knowledge makes them feel as part of "we, the fans." Conclusively, it must thus be acknowledged that the complexity of fanspeak and the effort its understanding and usage requires constitutes a major factor in generating a tightly-knit community of fans since "[m]embership," as McMillan and Chavis state in recognition of the emotions and commitment involved, is ultimately the "feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong" (9)—the boundary of jargon thus proves its fandom-internal function of inclusion.

As this subchapter has shown so far, fanspeak can obviously not be reduced to a simplistic role within the fannish community; instead, its status as a "*common symbol system*" has it acquire "several important functions in creating and maintaining [a] sense

of community" (McMillan and Chavis 10). Apart from its role in "mark[ing] the beginning and end of a community" (Cohen 12), its form of a boundary is moreover indispensable in validating membership, ascertaining a sense of belonging, and sustaining internal cohesion—the fannish jargon functions as some kind of linguistic 'glue' that binds together an increasingly global community of fanauthors, whose only contact is the shared practice of fanfiction writing, i.e. an activity which requires knowledge of its terms to participate with stories, reviews, forum entries, or blogs. In this way, the fannish jargon has shown particular relevance in facilitating communication and a "sense of community" among members from different nations with different cultural backgrounds and different native languages. While only a limited number of studies has as of yet discussed the "global disposition" of fanauthors,[123] whose interactions have been found to "illustrate a cosmopolitan, shared appreciation for multiple languages, different cultural perspectives, and alternative forms of text" (R. Black, *Adolescents* 78-79), my research reveals how there is not only an "appreciation for multiple languages," but how fanspeak virtually embodies the fans' "global disposition" since it functions as a shared means of communication for *all* fans participating. As such, this thesis explicitly extends to fanfiction in general a statement made by Andrea Wood in a study on female US-American fans of the Japanese genre of "boy-love mangas," where she claims that this specific fandom has "established a certain degree of shared terminology among all language groups […] regardless of on an individual's native language" (405).

[123] As mentioned earlier, R. Black focuses in her work on three native speakers of Mandarin who write fanfiction in English about Japanese subjects, concluding that fans "value and express interest in learning about the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (*Adolescents* 78). Moreover, Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore and Rebecca Williams's study "Transnational Twilighters" sheds light on a Norwegian community of *Twilight* fans, whose members discuss, for instance, the importance of language for fandom; foremost, they underline the differences between the English original and the Norwegian translation of the novels, which "cause an undesirable increase in the cultural distance between transnational fans and their fan objects" (193). While the two scholars do not include this in their article, fannish jargon may help here to decrease the "sense of marginalization" (194) Norwegians feel, in particular when compared with other, less easily surmountable difficulties such as fewer chances to attend conventions and other fannish events as easily as US-American fans.

Other studies have, for example, focused on the reception of *Harry Potter* and ensuing fan activities in China—together with the (non-fannish) publication of several fake *Harry Potter* novels under the name J.K. Luolin (Henningsen 276); in addition, researchers discuss the appropriation of Japanese anime by US-American fans (Leonard; Wood) or the establishment of international friendships over a shared object of fandom (Kozinets 73), and a 2013 special issue of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* dedicated itself to the topic of "Transnational Boys' Love Fan Studies." More generally, Jenkins describes an increasing globalization and transnationalization via media convergence in the field of popular culture, referring to it as "a new pop cosmopolitanism" ("Cultural Logic" 41; also cf. Jenkins, Ford, and Green 259-90).

The fan-texts I analyzed convincingly show that fanspeak functions as this "shared terminology among all language groups," as a collective jargon that is used by fans from different cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds. While something similar may also be said about fanfiction's default language of English, the difference between English and jargon is nevertheless striking: Although the bulk of all fanfiction on *FanFiction.Net* is written in English,[124] fanauthors still compose their stories in a wide variety of different languages—excluding English, in at least 18 others in *Star Wars*, 26 in *Supernatural*, and 36 in *Twilight*—but, no matter which language they use for writing, they all employ the same fannish jargon in their paratexts. More so than English, fanspeak provides a common language everyone can use and understand, creating a shared bond among all members despite their differing native languages or their differing degrees of proficiency in English. In short, it works as a lingua franca, i.e. as a "widely used auxiliary language to enable communication between people of different mother tongues" (Taavitsainen 643), and thereby facilitates both the interaction of fans and their access to stories whatever their own native or the texts' original language. While English may be the lingua franca of the Internet and certainly dominates much of fanfiction writing, fanauthors have thus created another "auxiliary language," whose usage often transcends that of English, even if it does not feature in the story text per se.

Via this lingua franca of fanspeak, fans therefore gain a considerable degree of access to stories such as Yogurti's German *Twilight*-story "Biss ich ausraste," fixusi's Finnish *Supernatural*-story "Näytelmä alkaa," or Nefadar's Hungarian *Star Wars*-story "Emeljük poharunk." Even texts written in languages not based on the Latin alphabet such as baicaoku's Chinese "Tripping Chinese Version" or LenaKaitaKuroiRico's Russian "Кошмары или Три Пробуждения и одна колыбельная," which both include jargon terminology in their paratexts, receive familiar frames when they juxtapose their own language and fanspeak: To fans, their summaries of "Slash.

[124] *Fanlore* claims *FF.Net* to have 80-85 percent of English stories ("FanFiction.Net"), which is only in part corroborated by my own research: In September 2015, *Twilight* had a total of about 218,000 stories, of which about 176,000 (≈81.0 percent) were English; *Supernatural* had a percentage of about 88.5 percent of English stories, and *Star Wars* of about 91.3 percent.

As to fanwriters with a native language of English, no fully reliable statistics exist: My own unpublished research of 2009, which dealt with the increasing transnationalization of fanfiction, yielded a percentage of roughly 55 percent, whereas the website *Fan Fiction Statistics* suggests a much higher share of about 76 percent ("Fan Fiction Demographics"). Nonetheless, the latter shows convincingly that "[i]n 2010, accounts on FanFiction.Net have been made and accessed by people in at least 173 countries, from Afghanistan to Zambia."

如果整个宇宙都定你和你禁欲的” or “Предупреждения: dark, angst, fluff, OOC” accordingly present themselves as far more accessible than if without any fannish terms. Convincingly, these and numerous other examples show that, “regardless of an individual’s native language” (Wood 405), any story may contain fannish terminology in their Author’s Notes, warnings, or other forms of paratext that informs speakers of different languages about the content of these stories, the approaches of these authors to fanfiction writing or the meta-text, or further concepts jargon codes in the genre. While reading the story is of course still impossible if a fan does not speak the language it is written in, the presence of fanspeak nevertheless makes these texts less removed and communicates various issues to the *entire* fannish audience.

Once fans have achieved command of jargon, interaction between fanauthors from every corner of the globe and every corner of fandom is therefore significantly facilitated. What is more, jargon removes to some degree the advantages native speakers of English enjoy based on the fact that most of fannish communication occurs in the language in which they are most proficient; instead, jargon is a norm that has to be acquired by everyone, regardless of the language(s) they grow up with, and thus presents the same obstacle to all newcomers without unduly privileging one group. Even though, for example, the abovementioned BBCullen identifies as a native Australian and macmoosie as a “twenty year old aspiring journalist and creative writer from the United States” (“Profile”), both still consider jargon “confusing” and have to ask others about incomprehensible jargon terminology. Again, fanspeak helps to provide cohesion within the community by serving as a “*common symbol system*” (McMillan and Chavis 10) that is not only held in “*common*” but also has to be learned in a “*common*” process.

In addition, fanspeak achieves more than putting fans on an equal level due to the lengthy acquisition process and the “rite of passage” (Rebaza 72) everyone has to undergo; its ability to serve as linguistic ‘glue’ and its transnational character are furthermore enhanced by the fact that its terminology does not, as I briefly mentioned in chapter 3.3, necessarily originate from fanfiction’s default language of English. While a certain percentage is indeed of English origin, many terms, albeit English, have acquired a new meaning in fandom; others represent neologisms or blends unfamiliar to speakers of any language; others yet again are part of forms of graphic writing with its very own conventions; and last but not least a considerable number of *non*-English terms have also become “part of the collective jargon” (Wood 405). Although all expressions have to be

learned by all new fans, it is the last category in particular that thus adds a further dimension to fannish cohesion and the inclusionary potential of fanspeak: Even as many of the meta-texts are US-American in origin, many fans are native speakers of English, and English functions as the default language of fandom, jargon nevertheless visualizes how much fandom relies on and appreciates contributions from all fans, irrespective of their background. As such, terms like the South Korean *manhwa*, the Scottish *kerfuffle*, or the German terms *Potterdämmerung*, *angst*, or *fest* have become fixtures in fanfiction to be acquired by nearly every fanwriter. In addition, Japanese, which plays a central role in the popular anime fandoms, has influenced fanspeak more than any other language, enriching it with terms such as *bishounen*, *itaku*, *chibi*, *hentai*, *otaku*, *sho(u)nen ai*, and *yaoi*.[125] Although all of them occur in different degrees of frequency according to their globalized or localized dissemination, their very presence constitutes proof of the transnational exchanges in fanfiction: The genre, according to Shelley Fisher Fishkin's approach to the transnational as laid out in her ASA Presidential Address of 2004, can be considered a "transnational crossroads of cultures" (41) and, despite its often assumed focus on US-American (pop) culture, shows time and again that "[c]ultural imperialism turns out to be too simple a model to understand how culture works" (33).

Nevertheless, the multidimensional character of fanspeak does not only ensure that narrow points of view that regard popular culture as essentially US-American are transcended but instead also transcends narrow points of view of jargon itself: Its various roles allow it to function as an important strategy of establishing agency and power within fandom, positioning it as a means that significantly contributes to the increasing democratization of the media industry: My research demonstrates that fanspeak is not at all reducible to "gobbledygook" or a "crime against language" (Nash 3) but proves to be an essential mechanism of fannish community-building with substantial consequences upon shaping fandom-internal and fandom-external power relations. A crucial prerequisite for the very presence of a community of fanauthors, it turns out to be a central factor of fanauthors forming the democratizing force of "we, the fans" and thus serves as a powerful strategy in creating, maintaining, and demonstrating fannish authority.

[125] Japanese has particularly influenced the language of slash due to the popular manga genre *shoonen'ai* (roughly translates to "boys' love"), although it is based on different identity constructions of its protagonists than fanfiction slash (McHarry; McLelland, "No Climax"; McLelland, "Why"; Sabucco; Wood). One of the terms taken from "boys' love," *yaoi* is actually an "acronym of *yamanashi, ochinashi, iminashi*, meaning "no point, no climax, no meaning" (McHarry; also cf. McLelland, "No Climax" 277), which was coined by Japanese fans in the late 1970s.

Extending Helen Merrick's contention made in regard to science fiction fans, I therefore argue that the fanwriters' own "specialised language" plays a major part in their developing an "identifiable cultural and social identity"—that is, the boundary of 'speaking properly' (cf., for example, Lave and Wenger 105-09; zvi_likes_tv) provides the fanauthors with the basis to initiate a change in today's media industry along more participatory and democratic principles.

In the first respect of fandom-internal matters, this chapter has shown fanspeak to perform the function of a cultural marker since it clearly defines the respective parts of the binary fan vs. non-fan by the dichotomy that results from of providing "cultural transparency" on the one hand and establishing a "barrier of meaninglessness" on the other.[126] Quotes like "Don't expect too much smutty stuff […] Destiel and Sabriel. I don't have any other shippings really. Fluffy fluff galore!" (Draviel) time and again prove how the fannish jargon indeed has the power to include and exclude: On the one hand, the complexity of terms and expressions ensures that non-fans cannot easily penetrate this "barrier of meaninglessness," impeding their participation and subsequent empowerment by requiring a considerable degree of "[*p*]*ersonal investment*" (McMillan and Chavis 10) in transitioning into fandom. On the other hand, fanspeak simultaneously signifies membership as its presence in fannish textual production points toward the long-time experience of the respective writer; the fanauthor 'speaks properly' and so experiences "cultural transparency."

Moreover, the fact that fanspeak allows fans to conceptualize the separation between the powerful and the powerless through the notions of "cultural transparency" and the "barrier of meaninglessness" has repercussions on fandom-external matters: In the fannish context, jargon overtly demonstrates Bourdieu's sentiment of language as an "instrument of power" (648), since the former, i.e. the transparency of knowing what to say and how to say it and understanding what others say and how they say it, is the only way to participate while the latter, i.e. not knowing and not understanding, bars anyone from participation—in this case language becomes a condemnation to inaction instead of serving as a Bourdieuan "instrument of action" (645). As such, the dual concepts of

[126] Rebaza uses the terms "cultural transparency" (52, 71) and "barrier of meaninglessness" (71) in regard to the status of members in a community of practice, i.e. to differentiate long-time members who have no "need for translation" (52) of objects or activities and newcomers who experience a "lack of comprehension" (71). In her text, she in turn refers to Wenger and Lave, who originally employed these concepts in their work on communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 102-03; Lave; Wenger 39-41).

"cultural transparency" and "barrier of meaninglessness" are significant in redefining old binaries: Instrumental in reframing fans as powerful and non-fans/producers as powerless, the fannish jargon, I thus argue, assumes a crucial function in repositioning the fannish community to turn fandom into a cultural force that wields a considerable "measure of power" (Sivarajan) over processes of production.

Accordingly, jargon cannot be reduced to functioning as the community's requisite barrier "to protect against threat" (McMillan and Chavis 9) from the outside, i.e. the creators of the meta-text, but it needs to be considered along the much more important lines of enabling fans to act as powerful oppositional agents who fully exert their agency on the meta-text and its creators. As such, fanspeak is not only significant in allowing fanwriters to reconceptualize the attribution of activity and inactivity in the relation of fans and producers but its fandom-internal functions in regard to community-building moreover provide the basis for fanauthors to *actively* reshape the distribution of power outside of their community: While an individual fan would be largely helpless and defenseless in the face of the overwhelming power of publicly well-known authors or sometimes even internationally operating media conglomerates, today's tightly-knit, cohesive, and ever growing community of fanauthors can both defend themselves and take action on their own.

The divergent fannish responses to cease-and-desist letters over the past decades provide a particularly illustrative example of communal power, with companies like Viacom, Lucasfilm, Warner, or Fox previously threatening individual fans to shut down fan(fiction) websites due to "clear infringement" (Clerc 32; also cf. Clerc 13-40; Murray 14-17; Johnson, "Fan-tagonism" 294; Jenkins, Interview) of their copyright. Whereas these "extra-legal" (Clerc 2) methods were successful in some early cases of the 1990s, the fannish community has since then rallied, protesting en masse or boycotting corporations and their products, which in the end has forced media companies to either "issu[e] a public *mea culpa*" (Murray 16) as in the case of Warner going against *Harry Potter* fanauthors in 2001 or to abandon such efforts altogether: "The result is a more permissive climate, one where cease-and-desist letters are giving way to appeals to help spread the word" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 298). Today, the individual fan, whose website or story is endangered by a cease-and-desist letter, is increasingly recognized as a member or representative of a large community that not only responds and fights back but that also wields enough power to influence other like-minded fans. Ultimately, as Jenkins

observes in a specific campaign to keep the TV show *Stargate SG-1* (USA; 1997-2007) on air, concerted action of the multi-voiced community of fans has made it possible for the "contemporary fan [to become] a modern day minuteman—ready to respond at a moment's notice to information that threatens their community, whether it is a cancellation notice or a cease and desist letter" ("Fan Activism"; also cf. T. Phillips).

Beginning with the (partially successful) "Save-*Star Trek*" letter campaign of the late 1960s, in which at least 114,667—some accounts even speak of 500,000 to a million—letters were sent to NBC to stop the show from being canceled (Jenkins and Tulloch, "Beyond" 9), fandom has therefore been long characterized by a "history of organized protest" (Clerc 5) that has always relied on a cohesive community that *acts* together[127]: Together, fans take action in contesting the producers via fan campaigns in respect to their objects of fandom, forms of fan activism with various agendas, or even fan-sponsored projects like the Organization for Transformative Works with its different branches of offering a free online fanfiction archive, an academic journal, and support in various fan-related matters. Individuals could never have achieved that a show is continued or that a cease-and-desist letter is revoked, and solitary fans could never have hoped to "actually compete with the author," both "in [their] own medium" (Busse, "Ghost") and outside of its boundaries. Through the years of continuous engagement with the text, the community has thus come to develop "a sense of right to appropriate" (Postigo 69), which is ultimately dependent on the force that a multi-million-membered community represents. Only as parts of a large community can fans challenge producers, exert influence on the meta-texts, and replace the notion of the singular text by a multi-voiced archive in which fanauthors participate as active agents in their own right. In this, as Lisbet van Zoonen notes, the similarity, or in her words, the "equivalence of fan practices and political practices" (63) becomes immediately apparent, since the participating community of "we, the fans" represents the foundation of exerting any effect on an otherwise hegemonial media industry just like the participating population of "we, the people" represents the foundation of any democracy. To stay with the metaphor, the

[127] For accounts on both successful and unsuccessful fan campaigns to save TV shows, cf., for example: Ross 94-95, 234-38; Murray 15-19; Menon 361-66; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 119; Jenkins and Shresthova; Kligler-Vilenchik et al.; Cochran. For a more fannish point of view, cf., for example: "History of Star Trek Fan Campaigns" or "Fan Campaign" on *Fanlore*, which list in extenso dozens of campaigns from the last decades and provide the links to a detailed analysis of each.

power of the fannish community acts as a revolutionizing force that dethrones the monarch of the singular author, who fails to uphold his status due to communal action.

"[W]e're fannish," an anonymous fan therefore explains so tellingly the communal power of fandom in Rebaza's "The Modern Coterie," a word which is after all largely synonymous with community,

> we're coming from a mindset that says there is no fundamental difference between a content provider and content consumer. […] In fandom, the fangirl who squees over your latest fic is often also the writer whose work is ten times more brilliant than yours. We see it as a community. [We're not] coming from a hierarchical mode, wherein having gotten something published (be it in some fifth-tier press with distribution only in the Dakotas and East Orange) means You Have Something To Say, and commenters are Those Who Should Listen. […] we try to listen to one another. I think this is by far the smarter way to go. (qtd. 167)

"We see it as a community" becomes the bottom line here; being an individual writer publishing his/her texts in a "hierarchical mode" does not count for anything other than functioning as a focal point for the figure of the external enemy that, "whether real or manufactured," researchers have identified as a major factor in community-building (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 121; also cf. Shirky, "Group") and which fans define themselves in opposition to and work against. The alleged achievement of getting "something published" does not make these producers invulnerable, just to the contrary: Since "we're fannish" and rely on communal cohesion, the fanauthors instead ridicule the people who adhere to the traditional mindset of the Barthesian "Author-God" and think they "Have Something To Say." In short, focusing on and acting through a community is judged to be "by far the smarter way to go" and serves as the foundation of fanauthors' agency.

Based on my research of fandom, its communities, their history and language use, I ultimately conclude that fannish communities reserve a discursive power for themselves that cannot be seen as separate from their linguistic practices and the cohesion it engenders among its members. Fan-texts announced as "drabblish" with "[s]ome Femslash and Yaoi and stuff like that" (MyxTourniquet) visually remind readers of the power of the fannish community—both because this community is "well-established enough to have acquired its own language" (MacDonald 28) and because the community itself depends on the existence of a fannish language. Its inherently important function as a boundary and the subsequent reconstruction it allows of the distribution of power between

fans and non-fans proves pivotal for the community of fanwriters, both in fandom-internal and fandom-external issues: Fannish usage of their jargon verifies its centrality in establishing cohesion on the inside, which constitutes a major prerequisite for fanauthors to form the strong community necessary to exert the power of the masses on the outside. In the end, fanspeak thus shows to be another tool that helps redefining fans as powerful and the producers as powerless. As such, it ultimately serves as a representative of the fanauthors' claim to authority and agency, allowing its interpretation as "linguistic capital," i.e. as the "*value* and *power* of speech" (Bourdieu 646). Analyzing fandom's position in the media landscape, my study even more so shows convincingly that fannish jargon cannot be reduced to functioning as a signifier of power in the relation of two speakers, as Bourdieu would have it (648), but fanauthors explicitly extend this power to the relation of a large community and the abovementioned publicly well-known authors or internationally operating media conglomerates: Instrumental both in fandom-internal and fandom-external relations, fanspeak decisively facilitates the upheaval of traditional power structures as it strategically codifies "the fan's power over, and participation in, the official, cultural text" (Fiske 43)—or rather, the fan*s'*.

3.3.2 The Fan Expert: Fanspeak as a Marker of Status

"If you want something done right, do it yourself," writes an anonymous fan on the popular website *TV Tropes* ("Fanfic"), describing the mindset of the millions of fanauthors out there. Although creating fanfiction about their object of fandom "with love" (Api Adore), fans are not only never satisfied with the meta-text but they also consider themselves as better suited than the producers to improve the published text to "something done right." This approach to the meta-text and the genre of fanfiction is, however, not restricted to the stories and discussions fanwriters constantly engage in but, I claim, becomes moreover readily apparent in fanspeak. When fans such as NightSwordSW, Marianna Morgan, or 22blue accompany their stories with paratexts that abound with "J/TK, H/L, Luke, OC's. LOTF AU post-Fury," "Pre-Series, Teenchesters […] Sick!Hurt!Hospitalized!Sam, Worried!Awesome!BigBrother!Dean," and "Fluff/UST/AH Alternating ExBPOV Rated M," they use their jargon as a distinct strategy of gatekeeping to construct themselves as experts—as competent in both fanfiction writing and, what is more, in matters regarding the meta-text: As fanauthors, they have authoritative knowledge about the meta-text and the entire archive, superior norms and values to the

producers as exemplified by their non-commercial gift economy, and they wield the power of their own language. In short, fanspeak overtly demonstrates that fans rather "do it [themselves]" in order to acquire "something done right"—it allowes them, as this chapter illustrates, to conceptualize themselves as 'professional' writers who claim the right to participate in the creation of cultural artifacts and who aspire to a new position in the media landscape.

Just like Laurie Pennie concludes in an article on the fan-favorite TV show *Sherlock* (GB; 2010-) that "fanfic is brilliant," fanauthors have long held the opinion that 'fandom knows best' (cf., for example, introductory). While this belief is certainly implicit in every story and frequently explicitly asserted in Author's Notes, my research of the use of fanspeak in the fandoms of *Star Wars*, *Twilight*, and *Supernatural* has uncovered another level of how fans visualize and vocalize their status as the true owners[128] and interpreters of and participants in the meta-text's archive: Employing their fannish jargon as a significant strategy to constitute themselves as experts, fans conceptualize themselves as agents and 'professionals' who are in no way inferior to the producers of the meta-text but whose knowledge, practices, principles, and even their language are superior to those of these traditional authorities. Explicitly, I argue, the fans' use of jargon makes clear how fanauthors displace the producers from their status as the only ones with the right to create texts and instead position themselves as the hegemons of the archive to ultimately reframe themselves as powerful producers and as legitimate participants in cultural production.

In resemblance to the "jargon of the professions" (P. Burke 7; Hudson 1-21) that I would see as particularly characterized by affirming the expertise of a specific person in a

[128] Increasingly, public perception and even the law seem to adopt a more fannish point of view of the meta-texts, as can be observed in a 23 December 2013 ruling of Chief Judge Rubén Castillo of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, in response to a civil complaint by scholar Leslie S. Klinger against the Conan Doyle Estate Ltd. Previously, the latter had sought to prohibit the publication of a collection of stories, edited by Klinger together with Laurie King, which was titled "In the Company of Sherlock Holmes" and featured the famous detective and other characters from its fictional universe but none of the original short stories or novels. The book, the Conan Doyle Estate Ltd. argued, constituted a violation of their copyright since some of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*-stories would only become part of the public domain in 2023, i.e. 75 years after they were first published. The court, however, maintained that while the specific stories would indeed remain copyright-protected until 2023, the characters of Sherlock Holmes and others were free for public use and could thus appear in new stories. When Klinger afterwards celebrated this ruling on his blog *Free Sherlock!*, commenting that "[t]his ruling clearly establishes" that "Sherlock Holmes belongs to the world," he also acknowledged the implications for fanfiction and its non-commercial fanauthors: "[P]eople want to celebrate Holmes and Watson," he writes, "[n]ow they can do that without fear" (also cf., for example, Schuessler; Albanese, "Court"; Albanese, "Conan Doyle").

field rather than his/her general membership in an occupational group,[129] the fanauthors' use of fannish terminology "mark[s] a fan's familiarity with, and status in fandom" (Merrick), i.e. marks both his/her membership and, especially, his/her thorough knowledge of the community's principles. While certainly an overt signal to fellow fanauthors that the respective writer is no longer a newcomer and has spent the required initiation phase in fandom as discussed in the previous subchapter, fanspeak thus also serves as a strategic affirmation of the fans' belief in their right to appropriate, alter, and transform the meta-text as one of the community's foundational concepts. As such, a summary that announces a story as an "AU version," which "is TPM my own way" (ArwenMUC), does not only use the non-jargon "my own way" to substantiate this right but employs the fanspeak expressions of "AU" and "TPM" to present the story's transformation of the meta-text of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* in a proper frame: Writing an alternate universe story, ArwenMUC first asserts her agency as a fanauthor, whose "own way" constitutes herself as a producer in her "own" right and affirms her independence from the meta-text or its creators; moreover, her distinct reliance on fanspeak to verbalize this *AU* of *TPM* situates her as an expert member of the fannish community who is intimately familiar with its conventions, principles, and transformational set-up. Clearly, as Helen Merrick asserts, fanspeak and its proper usage are here meant to "indicate cultural competency and in-depth knowledge of the fan community."

Innately, "cultural competency" and "in-depth knowledge" represent keywords in fandom, with fanwriters functionalizing their own terminology as "power words" that demonstrate not only their individual expertise but ultimately their community's "capacity to turn an idea into a reality" (Fahey 135), i.e. their capacity to translate their dissatisfaction with the meta-text into stories—and, in view of current developments in the media industry, sometimes also into the meta-text itself (cf. chapter 4). Employing fanspeak in an appropriate and cumulative manner thus affirms the power and

[129] In his work *The Jargon of the Professions*, Hudson, for instance, claims that a profession "in order to be recognised as a profession" has to "satisfy [certain] requirements"; among these it is essential that "full membership […] must be permitted only to those who have satisfied an examining and supervisory body that they have reached a satisfactory standard of training. There will be a document issued to successful candidates, which makes this clear" (8). While this, together with his list of occupations such as "doctors, dentists, lawyers, nurses, pharmacists and actuaries" (8) is certainly not immediately comparable to the community of fanauthors, I nonetheless argue that expertise—either in the form of a "document" that testifies to a "satisfactory standard of training" or the less formal fannish 'fandom knows best'—provides a salient link that allows drawing on "the jargon of the professions" to talk about fanspeak.

"competency" of the fannish community with its long history of a participatory and transformative culture while it simultaneously testifies to the fact that fandom is a complex structure that requires "knowledge" in various areas to enable membership: In respect to fanfiction writing itself, my research suggests that the presence of jargon symbolizes fannish knowledge, skills, and proficiency in at least five major categories significant in the genre's self-definition, thus verifying the multiplicity and multidimensionality of the fanauthors' expertise: It shows that a fan can in fact write fanfiction, i.e. that they can shape the archive in the transformative mode of *AU*, *OOC*, *slash*, *f/f*, *fluff*, *smut*, *OC*, or *Wincest* stories; it shows that they have an intimate knowledge of the fan-text, the meta-text, and the archive in *OTP*, *vignette*, *coda*, *tag*, *POV*, *shipping*, *Obidala*, and *Dark!Dean* stories; it shows that they have internalized the community's norms and conventions in *lemon*, *lime*, *PWP*, *h/c*, *whump*, *sho*(*u*)*nen ai*, *yaoi*, and *RPF* stories; it shows that they are long-time members of the fannish community in *r&r*, *A/N*, *NSFW*, or *WIP*; and, last but not least, it shows that they adhere to the principles of the fannish moral, or, gift economy in *beta*, *disclaimer*, *TPTB*, *IDIC*, or *songfic*.[130]

Altogether, paratexts such as "TWO-shot Fluff: One-sided AnakinXAhsoka also contains AnakinXPadme. Please don't read it if you not into Anisoka!" (Mandy23b) are therefore indicative of the fanauthors' knowledge and standing, signaling to their readers the experience they have acquired in multiple subject areas in the context of the genre. As terms cover so many different fields of fanfiction and therefore require the fans to have a wide range of expertise, both composing and understanding a summary that details a story as no other than "Song Fic. yaoi. Light fluffy and PWP" (music4ever2010)—i.e. as a sexually rather explicit story about a relationship between two men, conceptualized as a light-hearted romance, with lyrics as a major plot element—accordingly serve as

[130] Without deciphering each of the terms mentioned here individually, I nevertheless want to point out exemplarily in which ways they are indicative of the different areas of competency mentioned: *AU*/alternate universe stories transform the meta-text considerably and thus greatly re-shape the archive; the 'one true pairing' of *OTP* illustrates that the respective fan has formed an opinion as to his/her favorite character constellation based on intimate knowledge of the meta-text and other fanfiction stories after repeated engagement; labeling a story *lemon*, i.e. clarifying that it describes sexual situations explicitly, indicates that the fan knows, first, what differentiates it from the similar labels *lime* or *PWP* and, secondly, that such stories need to be preceded by a warning; the request to *r&r*, to please read and review, situates the respective fan as a member of the fannish community, whose appreciation of other fans' contributions dissolves the reader/producer binary; and *beta*, which stands for help and support provided without remuneration, signifies the fannish gift economy.

testimony to a rather universal expert status of the participants. Specifically important is here the fact that this knowledge is not restricted to linguistic knowledge, since the expertise fanspeak demonstrates goes far beyond knowing which term to use in which situation, but firmly situates the respective fanwriters as experts in all the abovementioned areas so vital to fanfiction writing.

From here it follows that mastery of fanspeak particularly signifies the fans' competency in various areas (most of) the producers[131] have little knowledge of, as immediately shed light on by their failed attempts to speak fannish jargon discussed before: Although they may seek to reserve for themselves ultimate authority over the meta-text in insisting on their "vision" (Martin qtd. in Ross 248), on "celebrating the story the way it is" (Ward qtd. in Harmon; Murray 11), their inability to employ the fannish jargon indicates their fundamental 'in-authority' in regard to the major fields of textual production the fannish terminology stands for, both in respect to fanfiction and in larger terms. As such, the fannish community and its conventions effectively prevent them from exerting their power and instead reframe them as inherently powerless: Not at all do their requests influence either the fans' transformative activities or the fannish belief in 'fandom knows best'—in "If you want something done right, do it yourself." In contrast, fanspeak overtly demonstrates the fields of expertise necessary for doing something "right," i.e. the fanauthors' superiority in any matter that concerns the creation of the meta-text and the enlargement of their archive. Not knowing the fans' language thus becomes a symbolic affirmation of producerly inexpertise; conversely, knowing the fans' language indicates fannish expertise and construes them as inherently superior. In this way, as their jargon informs anyone, the fanauthors' knowledge and proficiency in regard to the practice and texts of fanfiction writing, the community's norms, conventions, and "set of ethical guidelines" (Hills, "'Proper Distance'" 23), and their establishment of a "discourse of their own" (Wright 21) translates to a fierce belief in their own authority and power: Not only confined to the practice of writing stories per se, fans construct

[131] While I certainly acknowledge that the authors of the meta-text have their own kind of specialized knowledge and wield a jargon of their own in their capacity as 'professionals' (cf. P. Burke 7-8; Hudson 1-21), I have not detected too great a similarity between fanspeak and what I call here 'producerspeak': Although I have not studied the latter to the same degree, 'producerspeak' seems to be foremost directed inward, i.e. intended for issues within the 'community of producers'; although fanspeak is certainly also directed inwards as I discuss in the previous subchapter that deals with community-building, I conversely read this type of jargon as defined by its *outward* direction, i.e. its reference to the participatory and transformative character of its community whose professed goal is to produce text and to influence processes of textual production.

themselves as experts dominating the relation between themselves and the producers in text, values, and language.

First, as I have briefly indicated in an earlier part of this thesis, fans fiercely believe that they know the meta-text and its archive much more intimately than the producers. While it is certainly rather indisputable that fans have a better understanding of fannish writing and their own texts than the producers, jargon shows that they also ground their activities on the conviction that they have a more profound familiarity with and superior expertise in regard to the *meta-text*, which ultimately permits them to exert power over the entire archive: In the best tradition of Bacon's statement that "knowledge itself is power" (253), they thus create fanfiction to 'make things right.' "This [story]," writes, for instance, DaisyLuu, "is going to take place after Season 7. Supernatural says that Sam spent his year with a woman named Amelia. I say this is more wrong than a cow eating a burger. […] So I wanted to re-create Sam's wondrous year." Clearly, DaisyLuu insists on the 'wrongness' of the meta-text, basing her 're-creation' on the fact that her knowledge of the meta-text suggests to her that Sam would never have spent the year of his brother's absence with this "woman named Amelia." Like all fanwriters, she feels she knows the characters better than the creators of the meta-text and is therefore able to provide a more correct version of events.

Frequently indicated by employing fanspeak, this attitude inherently results from the fans' intense engagement and re-engagement with the text: "Rereading," asserts Booth in his analysis of fannish activities, "is a critical aspect of the fan's online interaction with a media object" (82). Moreover, as Jenkins recognizes, it has substantial implications for fannish agency since "rereading alters the priorities of the narrative and allows readers to bring it more fully under their own control" (*Textual Poachers* 68). In opposition to Barthes, who declares rereading to be an "operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, […] which is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors)" (*S/Z* 15-16), Jenkins therefore affirms the essential significance repeated engagement with the text assumes for the fannish community: True to the practices of fandom, he pronounces it to be "central" (*Textual Poachers* 69; 67-75) to fannish culture and activities, explaining how it assures that the fans' "understanding [...] become[s] progressively more elaborate" and takes them "well beyond the information explicitly presented" (*Textual Poachers* 73-74) in the meta-text. In the end, rereading ascertains the belief in 'fandom knows best' since fanauthors—

from the earliest re-readers of books, to the re-viewers of TV shows on videotapes, to today's 're-streamers' of any audiovisual material online—engage as intensely with the text as few other people, since they not only re-read the meta-text frequently but also extend their rereading well beyond it into the fannish archive. Acquiring ever greater knowledge is thus one of the foundations resulting from fannish activity, even to the extent that fanauthors are absolutely "expected […] to have expert knowledge of the fandom" (Wright 103) in order to be recognized as members of the community.

While stories and Author's Notes like DaisyLuu's innately depend on the familiarity and understanding ensuing from frequent rereadings of the text, the fanauthors' belief in their greater expertise in regard to the meta-text also finds its expression in another fan-favorite activity, namely pointing out its inconsistencies and "continuity jags" (Zubernis and Larsen, "*Supernatural* Nostalgia"). Not only does, for instance, the website *Supernatural Wiki* dedicate an elaborate collection of "Canon Discrepancies"[132] to revealing, as the show's executive producer Eric Kripke is quoted there, "mistake[s] in the script," but much of fanfiction is written with the express purpose of correcting or eliminating these very discrepancies. The story "Point of View" by Candace Marie, for example, "clears up the inconsistancies within the two triologies" of *Star Wars IV-VI* (1977-1983) and *Star Wars I-III* (1999-2005), while also "fix[ing]" some "diffrences in The ROTJ novelization and ROTS." Similarly, Citizenjess's story "Lost & Found" is "[b]ased on a little inconsistency snafu[133] regarding Ferus' Padawanship" and was "written mainly to try and explain […] how Siri would have trained Ferus at thirteen (per flashback snippets from 'Last of the Jedi #3') when she's off on a three year mission from what I calculate as Ferus being 12-15." In another telling example, introductory, who self-defines as "the biggest stickler for canon," even explicitly verbalizes the shared belief in the superiority of fandom when trying to create a timeline of the events in the meta-text of *X-Men: First Class* (USA; 2011) made her come to the conclusion that

[132] "Canon Discrepancies" lists eleven major inconsistencies that touch essential parts of *Supernatural*'s plot, such as "How Long Did Sam Spend at Stanford?" or "The Missing Year Between Seasons 5 and 6." Moreover, fans have also dedicated quite some time and effort to pointing out minor faults within the meta-text, exposing, for instance, that Sam's driver's license "lists SEX: F" or how a piece of information given in an episode of season nine does not match a line in "4.04 Metamorphosis, [when] Dean appeared to not know what a rugaru was."

[133] An expression regularly used among fanauthors, *snafu* originally stems from military slang, meaning 'situation normal, all fucked up,' and tends to refer in fanfiction to the conviction that it is a 'normal situation' for the meta-text to be 'all fucked up'—to feature "inconsistenc[ies]" (Citizenjess) or "mistake[s] in the script" (Kripke qtd. in "Canon Discrepancies").

> *this timeline is so fucked up I don't even.* There is basically no way to explain this timeline without bending space-time. […] I was initially very concerned about getting the timeline right with regard to the film, but now that I've worked it out? FUCK THE TIMELINE. Fandom knows best.

Overtly, all of these statements and fanfiction excerpts confirm what JessicaLynn concludes about her experience with "members of […] fandom," i.e. that they are "so obsessed with the [meta-text] that they kn[o]w more about all the little details than the author." Fans in general are "often extremely knowledgeable" ("What Is"), with their stories translating this knowledge to texts that transform the meta-text and so improve on its failures and inconsistencies. "There are Fan Fics out there that are INCREDIBLY good. Often being just as good, if not better, than the original work," writes an unnamed fan in a discussion of the genre ("Fanfic"), providing an assessment which lil-miss-choc affirms to be "very true," since "I've seen innumerable fanfics of people saying, 'I could do this better than [the producers] did.' And quite frequently, they do" (qtd. in foxesonstilts). Similarly, Hatteress states on the same fan's *Tumblr* blog that "[f]anfiction is 60% fun, 30% porn and 120,000,000% fixing canon because canon is WRONG and needs to go sit in the corner and think about what it's done" (qtd. in foxesonstilts). As such, these fannish voices echo what scholar van Zoonen observes in her study on the links between fan activities and political activities, where she acknowledges that fans, despite all stereotypes,

> prove to be a highly competent audience expressing critical assessments of the show that often surpass the knowledge of the producers. Some longtime fans feel they know the characters and their fictional community better than the writers and are struggling—as it were—with the writers about the ownership of the series. (61)

Referring in her argumentation to Nancy Baym's extensive 2000 study *Tune In, Log On*, van Zoonen conclusively points out how fanauthors come up with "new and better storylines," full of "creativity and wit" (62), in order to suggest the compatibility of democratic principles and the collaborative nature of fannish production: Following from there, participation of the many provides "better storylines" and, as our Western culture and history have it, also 'better politics'—at least in an "ideal democratic situation" with a high level of citizen engagement (13; also cf. Scafidi 117). So confirms, for instance, glitterarygetsit that it is the collaborative expertise of fandom's multi-voiced participatory culture which makes fans "better than the creators":

> [T]he fact is that you've got thousands of intelligent people thinking about a problem, and statistically speaking some of them are likely to come up with something more clever than the creators. […] There comes a point at which, frankly, fandom IS better than the creators. We have more minds, more cumulative talent, more voices arguing for different kinds of representation, more backstory. […] So… basically, for me, fandom is primary, and canon is secondary. The latter is really only there to facilitate the former. (qtd. in foxesonstilts)

Notwithstanding the fact that fanauthors express their belief in writing "new and better storylines" (van Zoonen 62) and "something more clever than the creators" (glitterarygetsit) in stories and categories of their paratext, this conviction also features particularly frequently in fanspeak, where it supports its general function of constructing the fans as the true experts. A "[t]ag to 'Jus in Bello'" written "[b]ecause I really wanted more h/c in this episode" clearly relies on the fannish language to convey that its author deanandhisimpala was dissatisfied with the meta-text of *Supernatural* and emphasizes that "fandom is primary, and canon is secondary" (glitterarygetsit). Similarly, tastyboots, who summarizes "3 Drabbles" with "Dean/Castiel; Angsty one-sided slash, Fluffy AU slash, Cracky gen fluff," uses a range of jargon terminology to express how her writing transforms the show's archive along a more accepted homonormative line of interpretation. A visual reminder of the fanauthors' far-reaching knowledge about both meta-text and archive, jargon continuously establishes their expertise and transformative power: They use their writing to make a *snafu* no longer 'fucked up' and "correct" in their stories, for instance, "Vampire Lore, Quileute Tribe Oral History, and some of the Twilight characters and storylines in Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse and Breaking Dawn" (catherinedove).

Although a major component, fanauthors nevertheless do not only use fanspeak to construct their expertise in matters of text; in a second—and extraordinarily important—instance, their terminology also becomes a major assertion of their superiority in moral matters, of their superiority in regard to fundamental principles of the fannish community that has always relied on participation and free sharing of resources. Jargon such as the request to *r&r*, i.e. to read and review, or the acknowledgement of *beta*-services codifies practices that define the community at its innermost core and direct the readers' attention to the values fanwriters harbor. The norms of fanfiction provide guidelines as to the behavior of fans within the community, focusing on establishing a world that is as separate from the producers' as possible through valuing fannish knowledge, contribution and collaboration, and, particularly important in this context, their gift economy. Notably,

fanspeak therefore illustrates how the fannish community dissociates itself from non-fannish principles, using their shared "'articles of faith'" (Busse, "Ghost") to demonstrate the moral superiority of their "world of affection" vs. the producers' "world of money" (Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 92).

Altogether, the moral codes of fanfiction and those associated with the meta-text stand in diametric opposition to each other, with the two spaces fundamentally incompatible in terms of their construction of values and guidelines for behavior. Highlighting the differences between fandom and the media industry, Jenkins, for instance, writes that "[e]ntering into fandom means abandoning preexisting social status and seeking acceptance and recognition less in terms of who you are than in terms of what you contribute to this community" ("'Strangers'" 213). Clearly, he recognizes that participation—in all forms of writing, reviewing, discussing, sharing, editing, or in any other productive capacity—supersedes "preexisting social status" and the privileges that may have been linked to it in terms of money or prestige. "Folks who do not produce creatively (whether that's stories, art, vids, recs sites, archives, even simply sending feedback regularly, whatever…) […] ir[k] me like an acid mist burning my skin," writes an anonymous fan, whose statement leads Rebaza to confirm that in fandom "issues of status, power and hierarchy" take a back seat to the more important principle of contribution (92-93).

Inherently connected to issues of participation and collaboration is the principle of the fannish gift economy[134] (cf., for example, Rebaza 84-124; Hellekson; Fiesler 745-53; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 47-84; De Kosnik; Scott, "Repackaging"; Stanfill), which defines the genre of fanfiction to a similar degree as the fact that it rests on contributions from a multi-voiced community. As briefly mentioned in chapter 3.2.2, fandom relies on "free exchanges of information and goods from individuals to a group, or from one individual to another" (Rebaza 85), i.e. standards that seem to violate all principles of our currently dominating commodity culture, since fans do not only make "fanworks available openly and freely without any formalized requirement that anything be given in return" ("Gift Economy") but openly shun all attempts of making money with fanfiction or from

[134] The fannish gift economy can be related to similar models that exist, for instance, in the performing arts that do not create objects to be sold, bought, and resold but instead rely on a singular performance which can only be witnessed. Nevertheless, one needs to buy ticket to see many performances and videos can be easily created from these to be sold, so that the comparison between these two movements does not fully hold up.

fanfiction. “YOU DO NOT MAKE MONEY OFF OF FANFIC. EVER,” dictates yuuo, emphasizing in caps lock that freely given gifts are “the centerpiece of […] fandom” (Rachael Sabotini). According to the fannish gift economy, monetary remuneration for writing fanfiction would constitute one of the harshest violations of the community’s ethical norms and result in firm policing of the perpetrators. Instead, fans freely offer their stories, reviews, *beta*-services, or any other form of participation to the community as gifts, expecting—if not individual reciprocity in form of receiving a similar gift personally—communal reciprocity, i.e. free access to stories, other fanauthors’ feedback, readiness to provide *beta*, etc.

Although there is consequently no “formalized requirement” (“Gift Economy”) to contribute something to the archive in response to having read a story, the principle of reciprocity as one of the three elemental characteristics of a gift besides giving and receiving (Mauss 37-41; Hellekson 114) thus ensures that the fannish community engages in a never-ending exchange of texts, which unstoppably enlarges the archive into infinity. When a fanauthor posts a story, he/she must make sure that it is freely available for anyone to read—and, of course, expects in return that he/she can read other stories; when a story is posted, the fanauthor can—and does—expect feedback from the community[135]; when *beta*-service is rendered, the *beta*-reader is mentioned in Author’s Notes, may receive a drabble written according to their wishes, or may have a piece of fan art designed for them. Even if gifts are usually not directly exchanged between two individuals, all forms of a gift and their ‘re-gift’ enrich the archive: Any text offered to the community is “incorporated into a multivocal dialogue,” so that “[t]he individuality of that piece is lost; it becomes a part of something greater” (Hellekson 115)—i.e. it becomes part of the archive fed by the fannish gift economy. Over the decades, fandom has thus formed a culture that is diametrically opposed to the commercialism the producers of the meta-text commit to: The fanauthors value feedback as the producers value DVD sales; they freely provide texts and support as the others charge for every merchandise article; they grant access to material without restraints as the others restrict it to those who pay. Or, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green write, “[w]ithin commodity culture, sharing content may be viewed as economically damaging; in the informal gift economy, by contrast, the failure to share material is socially damaging” (63).

[135] For a discussion of feedback within the context of the gift economy, cf. Rebaza 112-22, where she outlines how not every kind of feedback can be considered a gift but has in some instances moved “away from the elements of reciprocity, shared passion, or communal act” (118).

This "ethos of a non-profit, non-commercial community" (Rebaza 96) is so deeply-engrained among fanauthors that the few attempts to actually "MAKE MONEY OFF OF FANFIC" have largely—and often very spectacularly—failed. While it can as of yet not be fully evaluated to what extent Amazon's newest project Kindle Worlds, which invites fans to write fanfiction about "a licensed World" and then "accept a publishing contract with Amazon Publishing" (Kindle Worlds), will—or will not—influence the principles of the gift economy, it currently seems likely that it may not have too great an effect since its even promised royalties of 20-30% of the net revenue have not inspired many writers to engage with this publishing platform: Between its establishment on May 22, 2013, and early May of 2014, fans made less than 500 stories available for purchase, while they, for example, posted 1,025 new *Twilight* stories to *FanFiction.Net* alone within the single month of March 2014. Moreover, in early 2014 at the latest, fannish voices all over the web substantiate that fanauthors are already aware that Kindle Worlds "got problems" (felisblanco, 13 Mar. 2014) and have largely come to the understanding of not publishing with Amazon.

A more spectacular failure, however, was the FanLib project of 2007-2008, which has become notorious in fandom for its attempt to commercialize the non-profit work of fanauthors. Established by non-fan Chris Williams, a former *Yahoo!* executive, FanLib scouted for fans with the intention to have them publish their stories on their own archive website, where they would then lose all rights to their writing and would not be entitled to any profit FanLib intended to make with these stories from their cooperation with media companies.[136] "[V]ery clearly," Leva Cygnet thus writes, can it be seen that "from the beginning, it was designed to make money off of fandom": "It was a business, pure and simple" (Jenkins, "Transforming"). Quasi immediately after the first news began to spread in May 2007, fandom accordingly sprang into action, with fans working hand in hand to make FanLib "call the whole thing off" (Jenkins, "Transforming"), since, as angiepen points out in her analysis of the company's Terms of Service, "[i]t's perfectly clear—they get the bucks and we get the lawsuits." In view of that, Jenkins notes, "FanLib's efforts to commercialize fan fiction represented the worst case scenario: a highly publicized, for profit venture which left fan fiction writers even more exposed than they [were] before" ("Transforming"). In response, however, fanauthors, who rallied in a concerted fandom

[136] For a detailed description of FanLib, its intentions, the reactions it prompted in fandom, and its eventual demise, cf., for example: Rebaza 157-60; De Kosnik; Jenkins, "Transforming"; Cygnet; Ali; "Fanlib"; icarusancalion.

action of outright protest and boycott, brought FanLib to its knees: In August 2008, it "abruptly closed down" without giving "any specific reason for the closure" (Ali).

Violating the principles of the gift economy is therefore deeply antithetical to the fannish community, with the rare attempts to commercialize fanfiction[137] mostly doomed to failure due to the fanauthors' "social culture which frowns on self-promotion, acts of commercialism, or promotion of the group as a whole to outside entities" (Rebaza 89). Clearly, the community's outrage over and boycotts of these profit-oriented projects together with their condemnation and social shunning of fanwriters that agree to work under those terms demonstrates the moral superiority the fans feel to have over the producers: As DarkVoid proclaims, "Sometimes fan[s] know better than money-hungry producers." Overtly affirming the binary between the two involved parties and their differing concepts of exchanging content, this fan establishes the preeminence of fannish values fanwriters fundamentally believe in. The wording of "money-hungry" in particular ascribes moral authority to the fanauthors, whose gift economy thus becomes a way to discredit the creators of the meta-text and to simultaneously empower the fans. They are, after all, the ones who have "deeply held ethical norms" (Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 91) they do not sell for profit.

While fans openly display their belief in their own moral superiority in these specific incidents, they also use the global feature of fanspeak to demonstrate it in their

[137] Apart from Kindle Worlds and FanLib, among the more prominent failures are, for example, the *Fandom, Inc.* controversy of 1999-2001 over trademarking 'fandom,' which the "fans won" ("Fandom, Inc."), or the *CJ* incident, in which a popular fanauthor "offered to continue [writing] if readers were willing to donate money so that she could have financial support for her writing time" (Rebaza 89; 89-101). A very rare example of success offers the British author Erika Leonard, better known as E.L. James, whose immensely well-selling novel trilogy *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011-2012) is largely based on her *Twilight* fanfiction stories, which she had before posted on *FanFiction.Net* under the screenname of Snowqueens Icedragon. Publishing stories after "eliminating identity markers," also known as "pulling to publish or filing off the serial numbers" (Stanfill) may be the most frequent way to make profit from fanfiction—and the most likely to succeed since it only involves individual writers and thus does not necessarily undermine the communal gift economy to the same degree (for the tensions this practice and *Fifty Shades in Grey* in particular generated in fandom, however, cf. Jones, "Fifty Shades").

Both the failed and the successful attempts to commercialize fanfiction have led some scholars to argue for "fan work [to] be integrated into the commercial cultural economy" via an as of yet rather unspecified "hybrid economy" that would interweave commodity culture and the principles of the gift economy (Noppe). For further arguments, both pro and contra commodification, cf. Noppe; De Kosnik.

Moreover, as a March 2014 special issue of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* on *Fandom and/as Labor* testifies to, fannish productivity is increasingly recognized as "labor," i.e. as something that generates tangible "value" and repositions fans as a "vital part of the new economy" (Stanfill and Condis), which in the end, as some of its articles propose (cf., for example, Stork; Chin; Helens-Hart) may force both fanauthors and the media industry to adapt to these changed circumstances.

writing. A fixed practice of the genre, *r&r*, for instance, reminds fanauthors continuously of the gift economy they are part of: Often already included in the summaries, such as in WRATH77's "Two Angels and a Hunter," the plea to "[p]lease R&R and give any comments/critiques/thoughts about this" (FrostedPurpleIrises91) frequently shows up in Author's Notes, enticing readers to leave the gift of feedback. Moreover, the fannish values manifest themselves in the emphatic acknowledgement of *beta*-services rendered, with writers mentioning their *beta*-readers in their A/Ns, bestowing copious amounts of gratitude on them, and in turn showing their appreciation by in fact writing more stories. So writes LOTRRanger, for instance,

> This fic is dedicated to the lovely, wonderful and completely awesome and amazing Chloes-Cheese, who has patiently […] stuck with me through my writers blocks and has been very understanding. Did I mention she's awesome? Yeah, she is. :) And a big thanks to Angel of the Night Watchers, my beta, who is also extremely awesome and without whom my stories would be incomplete.

Fanspeak thus represents an important means of openly displaying the fannish gift economy with its "'thou shalt not profit' rule" (Fiesler 749). Together with their emphasis on participation as a principle of textual production, the fans' belief in and adherence to their own ethical guidelines have major repercussions on the relation between the "money-hungry producers" and the fanfiction community, with fans invoking the authority that comes from their supposed moral superiority: Explicitly announced by the global distribution of fannish terminology, fans are the ones who work with *beta* and *r&r*—independent from commodity culture, they act in a "morally appropriate fashion" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 52).

Fans, as I have shown, thus harbor a fierce belief in their expertise and their superiority in terms of both text and values; what is furthermore significant in this respect is the fact that they do not only embrace these convictions in a more abstract fashion but that they actually use fanspeak to openly inform any reader of them. Accordingly, language in itself proves to be a third level that fans instrumentalize to define themselves in respect to the producers, since they use their jargon to eliminate the producers' language as the only available option for discourse and instead provide a decidedly fannish language: With fanspeak, fans establish a "discourse of their own," which they enforce as the only "accepted and expected way of discussing texts" (Wright 21) within fandom. More than a mere alternative, it represents a fully normative convention that serves the specific purpose of establishing fannish hegemony over the archive and that

allows fans to affirm their dominance over both their fan-texts and the meta-text: With "E/B HEA Lemons" (Jadalils), fanauthors transfer the fight for more participation to the realm of language, as they are no longer forced to use the producers' language that conversely dominates the meta-text and its non-fannish discourse. Instead, the distinctly fannish terminology of fanspeak liberates the archive from its linguistic confines, enabling the fans, first, to distance themselves from the creators of the meta-text and, secondly, to create a viable platform for their participation: Independent from non-fannish discourse, they generate their own specialized jargon to assert their share in the meta-text and their ownership of the archive, which ultimately enables them to participate not only in content but also on the meta-level of discourse. As Wright suggests, language here turns into a distinct "site of struggle" (21), where different forces vie for dominance via the use of a particular language.

Wright's conclusion that jargon constitutes the only "accepted and expected way of discussing texts" (21) shows the extent to which fans have already decided this "struggle" for themselves: Both the omnipresence of fanspeak and its function as a boundary in processes of community-building testify to the fact that fanauthors have enforced jargon as the solely available terminology in fandom, with their insistence that "newbies who come to fandom […] learn our fannish jargon and mores" (zvi_likes_tv) completely negating the notion that its use may be merely optional or that its status may be equal that of non-fannish language. Instead, they continuously dismiss the traditionally dominant discourse, indicating their preference for a language they believe to be better suited for participating in the archive by the copious number of terms they have specifically created for talking about and writing in the archive of the meta-text. As such, they use their jargon to establish themselves as superior to the producers, with their terminology evidencing both their capacity in transforming the meta-text into a more multi-faceted archive and the expertise they have acquired in their intense engagement with the meta-text. Fanspeak accordingly illustrates the fanauthors' conviction that English, or any other language the creators of the meta-text may have used, does not at all suffice but that fandom requires another language to be able to express and encompass all the different shades of the archive—of the multidimensional intratext which fandom turns the rather one-dimensional meta-text into. Fanspeak thus proves a corrective for the fact that non-fannish language can hardly convey elaborate concepts such as *slash*, *Vaderkin*, or *Wincest*, since these terms tend to serve as linguistic shortcuts to the infinite fannish archive.

Based on this, I thus read fanspeak as representing the fans' deliberate abandonment of the language of the producers in favor of a language that symbolizes their participation through coding an entire "discourse of their own" (Wright 21)—i.e. through coding an entirely different conception of text and authorship on a very visual and immediately apparent level. In this way, fan-texts that are characterized by fannish jargon like Edwardxlovesxme's summary "J pov BXJ/ BXE M for a reason! Smutty lemons!" of her story "Mr Brightside" indicate to any member of the audience that the respective fanauthor adheres to different principles than the creators of the meta-text. Thereby, it suffices to recognize the terms used as non-English, or as fanspeak; it is not even necessary to be able to decipher them, although understanding the phrases certainly provides a more profound impression of fannish superiority and expertise than the simple identification of their presence. Altogether, fan-texts like "AU/Slash/Darkward" (MyTwiDreams) therefore offer a multidimensional assertion of fannish sovereignty, with the very existence of fanspeak testifying to the fannish claim of participation and its interpretation testifying to the transformative capacity of fannish writing: As indicated by jargon, MyTwiDreams easily creates an alternate homonormative universe that features the positively connoted 'hero' of *Twilight*, Edward, as *Darkward*, i.e. a "dark, twisted," "dominant and stalkerish" "bad-ass character" (Cullen818).

On the whole, as my research of the function of fanspeak in the areas of text, values, and language has shown, the fans' "discourse of their own" contributes immensely to the fanauthors' empowerment in allowing them to demonstrate their expertise, their superiority, and their participation in three vital areas of fanfiction writing. Significant as an indicator of knowledge—of the expert status—of the respective fanauthor, using jargon fulfills a two-fold purpose that establishes a fan's power and authority both within fandom and in opposition to forces outside of fandom. In regard to community matters, it needs to be stressed that fanspeak's function as a signal of expertise fulfills an essential role in the identity construction of both the community of fanauthors and an individual fanauthor, since it is indicative of, first, the presence of firm communal norms and conventions and, secondly, of a specific fan's long-time engagement and commitment to a fandom-internal audience of fellow fanauthors. In respect to the latter, jargon thus leads to and simultaneously reveals differences in the status of fanauthors—at least for the period of time required for the initiation of newcomers: A "writer's power and authority within the discourse community," confirms Wright accordingly, "rests upon her engagement with the

discourse [and] her specialized knowledge of the discourse" (35). Related to jargon's role in community-building as a salient proof of membership, a fan's proficiency in using fanspeak thus signifies their standing within the community, affirming their status as experts according to the expectations of their fellow fanauthors: "To do well," writes Sirpa Leppänen, "fan fiction writers thus need to (learn to) signal to their readership that they have sufficient expertise. […] Without this […], writers may run the risk of being ignored, ridiculed or excluded" (62; also cf. Wright 96-109; Baym 114; R. Black, "Language" 176-82).[138]

With fanspeak just such a signal, its usage and, associated with it, the respective fanauthor's expertise thus constitute the only viable means of distinguishing the status of different fanwriters. According to my research and my own fannish experience,'non-expertise' presents the sole criterion that somewhat restricts participation in fanfiction, while other inequalities between fans that have been addressed in previous scholarship (cf., for example, Hills, "'Not Just" 103-11; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 30-35) do not have the same effect: Neither certain widely-read and much-recommended fanauthors such as *Twilight*'s Ylfcwen or vjgm[139] nor the previously mentioned *BNF*s, i.e. Big Name Fans with, for instance, popular websites such as the *Supernatural Wiki*, prevent others from writing and participating in some other form and so do not fundamentally affect other fanwriters' "power and authority within the discourse community" (Wright 35), which, after all, stem from the fans' participation and their transformative engagement

[138] Inter alia, Wright "explore[s] the specific challenges faced by new fan writers entering the discourse community" (3) that result from the expert status of more experienced fanauthors, thus disclosing a certain hierarchy within fandom dependent upon (not) fulfilling the expectations for writing prescribed by the community's norms. She ascertains that the "areas in which new writers receive the most critique from the gatekeepers [i.e. the long-time members of fandom] are storytelling mechanics, grammar/spelling, and canonical knowledge. In the process, the gatekeepers often […] harshly criticize stories that do not follow the standards, rules, 'jargon,' and traditions of the discourse" (3). Consequently, as she points out, fans do not only engage in "subverting the power supposedly held by author(s) or producers" but "power is re-inscribed by members of the fan community through policing of characters' portrayals, accuracy of canon facts, and standard grammar" (85). Nevertheless, Wright also acknowledges the collaborative nature of fanfiction I discussed earlier, conceding that through reviews and other means of feedback and support, the community's members "ac[t] as collective creative writing instructors" (99) to minimize the differences in status between fans. Accordingly, her research also supports my evaluation of the genre as fundamentally democratic since, in the end, participation is what counts and, with time, the differences between long-time members and newcomers tend to disappear.

[139] Providing an idea of the participatory atmosphere in fanfiction, Ylfcwen's one-chaptered story "Inappropriate Attire," for instance, has—as of September 2015—acquired more than 750 reviews and was favorited more than 600 times. Even more widely-read, vjgm's 18 chapters of "Family Therapy Cullen Style" have prompted close to 8,400 fanauthors to review and more than 7,500 to favorite it.

with the meta-text. Signaling a fan's deep immersion in the fannish community, fanspeak thus immediately invests fans with said "power and authority"—it lets them dodge "the risk of being ignored, ridiculed or excluded" (Leppänen 62).

In view of that, the difference between the expert long-time fanauthor and the inexpert newcomer presents the only salient measure of a fan's status in fandom-internal matters, with the knowledge expressed by appropriate fanspeak usage immediately professing the respective fan to be a long-time and therefore esteemed member. Aside from this context, however, this link between knowledge and status—or power—manifests itself even more prominently in matters directed to the outside of fandom, i.e. in the relation between fans and producers. The expertise signified by jargon eliminates to a large degree the assumption that mere amateurs, i.e. people who do "something poorly," who are "not skillful," and who are "lacking in experience and competence" ("Amateur")—who have a lower status and less power—, engage in fanfiction writing; instead, their knowledge reframes them as 'professionals' who may not write for a living but who are in no way inferior to the creators of the meta-text. As such, fanauthors eradicate the difference in status the producers frequently insist upon when they compare their own activities and fanfiction, dismissing the latter as "suspicious" "exercise" that is of such little quality as to "make me gouge my eyes out with a rusty spork."[140]

Via the areas of knowledge, values, and language, jargon thus supports fanauthors in their attempt to be recognized as equals with the power and agency to participate in the production of culture and, in particular, the production of the meta-text: Their writing is not a mere "exercise," not a mere step towards becoming professional writers, but requires at least as much—if not more—knowledge as the creation of the meta-text, since fanauthors need to have deep understanding of the archive to be accepted as members of

[140] Asked, for instance, about George Lucas's relationship to *Star Wars* fans, Jenkins pronounces Hollywood to have always been "deeply suspicious of amateur productions" (Interview); professional author Racheline Maltese calls fanfiction an "exercise" in an interview on *Harry Potter* (qtd. in Grossman); author Charlie Stross writes most of fanfiction off when he asks fans to only contact him with a "viable" "commercial idea" that "doesn't want to make me gouge my eyes out with a rusty spork." Moreover, Stephenie Meyer comments on the difference between amateur fanfiction and professional writing, asserting that the former "makes [her] frustrated" because of the time and energy fans supposedly waste with their activities: "I'm like...go write your own story. Put them out there and get them published. That's what you should be doing. You should be working on your own book right now" (qtd. in Genet). Other meta-textual creators underline the fact that their writing is their profession, which entails that they both make their livelihood from it (cf. Martin, Stross; Card qtd. in Grossman) and that they put effort into their work—that, in George R.R. Martin's words, they are "laboring," as opposed to fannish dabbling.

their community. Being more familiar with the entire fictional universe than the producers accordingly constitutes one of the very basic concepts fans ground their reconceptualization of their own status on, using this together with emphasizing their own value system and their independent language to transform themselves from powerless into powerful—to transform themselves from amateurs into authors in their own right. Employing their jargon to disqualify the 'superficial' knowledge of the producers of the meta-text that leads to "continuity jags" (Zubernis and Larsen, "*Supernatural* Nostalgia") and "inconsistancies" (Candace Marie), to denigrate their commodity culture—the "financial aspects" George R.R. Martin considers so important so as to turn the authors of the meta-text into a "glittery and avaricious dragon who is jealous of his steaming pile of gold" (Stross)—, and to reject their language that does not suffice to express concepts vital in fandom and its transformative activities, fanauthors frame themselves as experts and professionals, whose productivity has the power to influence the media industry: "Knowledge, just like money, is always a source of power," recognizes Fiske accordingly, appending that "fan cultural knowledge differs from official cultural knowledge in that it is used to enhance the fan's power over, and participation in, the official, cultural text" (43).

Clearly, as Fiske's statement supports, fans therefore employ fanspeak for their empowerment, with their "discourse of their own" supporting their participation in the production of text in the first place and substantiating their claims for an increased integration of fans and their activities in a more democratic media landscape in a second step. Allowing them to conceptualize themselves as members of an inherently powerful and knowledgeable community, their jargon announces the fanwriters' agency to everyone who comes across their "unclear acronyms and lots of punctuation" (Hellekson 113), signaling both their expertise and authority, and, ultimately, therefore also their right to participate: Fandom, fans confirm with writing "Tag to AHBL, Unseen 'verse" (Mizu Iruka), simply does 'know best' since it takes a fannish expert to decipher the fans' writing, to be able to access their archive, and to contribute to its enlargement—both within fanfiction, and, in extension, also in respect to the meta-text. Omnipresent, their language therefore gives voice to their mindset of, "If you want something done right, do it yourself" ("Fanfic"), and positions them as hegemons over the archive. In the end, the fanauthors' belief in their superior knowledge—their high cultural capital, to reference both Bourdieu and Fiske—thus entails for them a certain "right of ownership of the [meta-

]text" as its true experts and, even more important, the right of "interaction with that text on an equal footing" (Cherry 69). Redefining the fanwriters' status from amateurs to professionals, jargon accordingly serves as one of the fans' strategies of empowerment since it fundamentally situates fanwriters as legitimate participants—as democratic actors in the field of media production.

3.3.3 "An Instrument of Power": Fanspeak as Cultural and Linguistic Capital

In summaries of "Just a one shot with Mara and Leia, written mainly because there is too little femme slash for OT characters […] Total fluff" (DarkJediJade), fanspeak, I conclude, constitutes an "instrument of power" (Bourdieu 648); it acquires the function of "linguistic capital" that marks the "*value* and *power* of speech" (Bourdieu 646) both within and without the fannish community, allowing fans to employ their own language as a means of affirming their agency. Constructing it as a means to define producers as powerless and to reconceptualize themselves as powerful in both of its major functions discussed here, fanauthors strategically utilize their own terminology to (re-)enforce their claims to participation in texts and the creation of cultural goods. Via fanspeak, they invoke their power as a cohesive community with firm boundaries and as acknowledged experts with superior knowledge and conventions to frame their demands for a new status within the binary of producer and consumer—within the media industry and its traditionally fixed distribution of roles. Instead of being satisfied with being construed as passive amateurs, fanauthors actively engage in "creating linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital" (Ross 144) and translate their jargon into statements of their own "discursive power" (Hills, "Not Just" 114).

In a first time analysis of fanspeak in fan studies, the preceding subchapters have shown that the fannish jargon requires omnipresence and a certain degree of complexity to become 'powerful': Both of these aspects make up the necessary prerequisite for its contribution to community-building and the fanauthors' expert identity, since, if fanspeak did not take time to understand and apply, it could neither serve as an obstacle and a means of fostering cohesion and communication nor as a strategy of demonstrating the superiority of fannish knowledge, values, and language. External boundaries and internal solidarity just as well as the fans' transformation from 'amateurs' to 'professionals' innately depend on the binary created between members that comprehend and outsiders

that accordingly do not. Ultimately, my research shows that paratexts like "1-shot. Pre-Series […] (Dean/Sam) Wincest. Pure schmoopy fluff PWP" (morganaDW) are made to keep non-fanauthors out, to encourage new members to inquire about its meanings in talking to other fans or accessing fannish resources, and to establish the respective fan as an expert in everything relating to fandom, fanfiction, the community, and textual production.

Altogether therefore, my study illustrates that the two major functions of fanspeak greatly influence the relation of the fans to the producers by providing fundamental bedrocks for the fanwriters' empowerment. Apart from the fannish jargon's (symbolic) redistribution of power, establishing cohesive communities and reframing the fannish identity are both no mere fandom-internal issues but greatly impinge on the binary that the creators of the meta-text seek to uphold, i.e. have essential fandom-external consequences in enabling the fans to slowly dissolve this very binary and to become producers in their own right. Based on my research, I thus conclusively ascertain that fanauthors first employ jargon as a strategic feature of their community-building, where the boundary it establishes between fan and non-fan has the three-fold purpose of exclusion, inclusion, and providing a threshold: Fanspeak's exclusionary potential serves to keep non-fans outside of the fannish communities with the objective to deny them the power that comes from participation; as non-participants the latter cannot shape the meta-text and the archive, they are non-agents—and, in the end—non-producers. Moreover, the fannish jargon contributes to the internal identity formation of the fannish community itself, since that inherently depends on the "sense of community" (McMillan and Chavis 6) its members develop through their use of the same language, regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the threshold function of fanspeak also creates a point of entry for prospective fanauthors and helps to integrate new members into the community, so that it aids the fans in creating the cohesion necessary for the fanauthors to confront the producers with their claims for more power and increased participation. Instead of acting as disconnected individuals, they can bring in the "sheer power of the masses to get what they want" (Team Sexy Volturi Guard). In light of this, 'speaking properly' constitutes more than an expected standard fans, both long-time members and newcomers, need to conform to; it foremost serves as a significant strategy to ensure that the fannish voice is heard—that they are being listened to on the basis of the power of their speech (cf. Bourdieu 648-49).

In a second step, my study has determined that fanauthors employ the power of their speech to eliminate the denigration of their activities that tends to accompany describing their writing as the work of amateurs (cf., for example, Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 655; Jenkins, Interview). Instead, they assert their proficiency and their knowledge through their prolific use of jargon, so that "[a]ll *amateur* means now is 'unpaid'" (Bode) instead of constituting the diametrical opposite of 'expert.' With texts such as "SLASH Destial MPREG. warning: some OOC" (Dementors hate chocolate), fans thus show themselves to have expertise—to have even *superior* expertise than the producers since they assert their stories to have "better storylines" (van Zoonen 62) and their writing to constitute a "much improved version of the original" (Maiya9182). With their transformative power, their gift economy, and the "discourse of their own" (Wright 21) looming large in their jargon, fanauthors therefore conceptualize themselves as having substantial powers over the meta-text, its archive, and its producers. As such, the fannish jargon is more than a simple linguistic feature of the genre; it is a strategy on part of the fanauthors to give voice to their expertise, their new status, and—resulting from this—their demand to a greater measure of power and agency within the media industry.

On the whole, my study of hundreds of fannish paratexts has thus shown that superficially simple enough texts like "there maybe a lime or lemon in here" (Storyteller's Dream) are not truly simple. Opening up a new chapter of fan studies, I argue that the fans' "secret language" (Nash 4) helps them to achieve, demonstrate, and emphasize their agency by supporting them in community-building and affirming a new powerful identity that is diametrically opposed to that of the powerless consumer they are conventionally ascribed. Via their abundant and proficient usage of terms that are only comprehensible to long-time expert fanauthors, they truly build up a specifically fannish form of "linguistic capital" that serves them as an "instrument of power" (Bourdieu 646; 648), since it enables them to redefine their status, to broaden participation, and to advance the democratization of the media industry. Numerous fannish campaigns to 'save' their favorite TV shows, movements to stop the commercialization of fanfiction, and concerted action to make copyright owners withdraw or cancel sending out cease-and-desist letters are examples of the fanauthors' agency and the efficacy of their strategies to reposition them as influential participants in the contemporary media landscape: With fanspeak, fans ultimately establish not only a community of "we, the fans" but a community of experts who are able to shape the archive, the meta-text, and the processes of cultural production.

3.4 "Well, I had this plan to buy them…": Fannish Agency in Story and Paratext

> "Well, I had this plan to buy them from CW…but the fact I have no money, income, or way to contact CW kinda got in the way."
>
> KayValo87, "Breaking Point."

> "AN (Always Read These Since I Wouldn't Put One Up Without A Reason!) […] This will be COMPLETE Mary Sue because I really want nothing more in life then to pretend I am Bella.
> […]
> These eyes of my Bella, (a name which belonged upon my lips as much as a goddess's kiss upon the lips of a murderer,) my dearest love, grew farther away from my face […] Bella flushed the most *adorable* shade of sanguine I've seen since… well, earlier today, actually. […] But even though a screen flickered before me, and sound burst through the speakers surrounding us, nothing in this world could fascinate me more than the lovely… *angel* sitting beside me. I wanted dreadfully much to gaze once more into those oceans of deep honey-fused-"
>
> Illavyn412, "Her Mind."

> "RPS: Behind the scenes of Supernatural. Misha plays an angel […] Other Characters: Jensen, Jared […]
> Disclaimer: I don't own any rights to Supernatural nor do I have control of any of the actors working on the show, though it would be cool! This is just a RPS this is fiction! Not real.
> […]
> Misha stumbled into the trailer and fell onto the bed. Castiel's coat fluttered in his wake as he brought his arms up in a mock gesture to protect his face from the mattress. He was exhausted. Mentally, physically, the whole nine yards. They'd run him ragged all day, damn Cas-centric episode. Jared was only there to be eye candy for the damn demons, hell even Jensen was only there to be a damsel in distress."
>
> Knives'Ghostwriter, "Parlor Tricks."

"Well, I had this plan to buy them from CW," proclaims KayValo87 in a disclaimer preceding her *Supernatural* story "Breaking Point," "but the fact I have no money, income, or way to contact CW kinda got in the way." Phrasing her paratext in such a way so as to clarify that she has never had any real intention to buy the characters of Dean and Sam Winchester, or the actors who play them, Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki, from the show's network The CW, she conforms to the fannish convention of

framing stories with a disclaimer that is meant to "indicat[e] that the fan is not claiming to own, or to have invented, any copyrighted characters or concepts that she is writing about" ("Disclaimer"). In another example, Illavyn412 uses her Author's Notes to set up her fanfiction "Her Mind" as a "COMPLETE Mary Sue because I really want nothing more in life then to pretend I am Bella." With her story centering on "my dearest love," the "lovely…*angel*" Bella, whom Illavyn412 "pretend[s]" to be, she thus composes a story of the *Mary Sue* genre in which an avatar of the fanauthor herself enters the fictional universe, either in the form of an idealized character from the meta-text or in the form of an "amazingly intelligent, outrageously beautiful, adored by all around her" (Pflieger) character she has created herself. And last but not least, Knives'Ghostwriter introduces her story "Parlor Tricks" as set "[b]ehind the scenes of Supernatural" and as featuring the actors Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, and Misha Collins as characters within the story text, making it a classic example of the fanfiction genre of *RPF*, or *RPS*—for Real Person Fiction or Real Person Slash—, which has her extend her power over the archive in a completely new dimension, even though she claims to have no "control of any of the actors working on the show."

Already indicated by these very brief examples, Author's Notes and fanspeak do not constitute the only strategies fans employ in demonstrating their agency and power. Although I do not discuss disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF/RPS to the same extent as the two aforementioned categories in the frame of this dissertation, my research nevertheless suggests a considerable significance of these means of appropriation in the continuous struggle for fannish authority, which has led me to dedicate to them a concluding subchapter within the context of my textual analysis in order to open up possible areas for further fan studies scholarship. Moreover, studying these three forms yields a decidedly broader and more representative look into fannish strategies of gatekeeping, touching upon areas this thesis by no means intends to neglect but cannot cover comprehensively due to the vastness of the field: My reading and examination of several hundreds of stories points towards the presence of a large number of different strategies fanauthors use to establish themselves as powerful producers in their own right—both in the stories' paratexts and in the stories themselves so as to exceed the frame of this dissertation considerably. The sample I have assessed suggests that a complete survey of the genre in regard to strategies of empowerment would yield that fannish attempts at gatekeeping can be found in all forms of fannish writing: in several other types of paratext like, for

instance, reviews or warnings; in different story genres like, for instance, slash, *hurt/comfort*, or the ones listed in Jenkins's "Ten Ways to Rewrite a Television Show" (*Textual Poachers* 162-77); and, last but not least, also in specific forms of fanfiction writing that result in multimodal and intermedial stories (cf. B. Thomas, "Gains"; Leppänen 73-76; Page 3-5) like, for instance, *crossovers*, i.e. stories that extend over the archives of several meta-texts, *songfics* that include lyrics as a major element of the plot, or *podfics* in which the text on the page/screen is transformed into or accompanied by audio material. Nonetheless, the categories I intend to look at in this last subchapter, namely disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF/RPS, feature major strategies that provide a decidedly new angle on fannish agency—not only in light of my previous findings described within this dissertation but especially within previous research on fanfiction.[141]

Here, disclaimers represent a specifically fascinating category because the fact that they can be read as testifying to fannish agency stands in diametric opposition to their originally intended purpose, i.e. to give proper attribution to the producers of the meta-text as its 'original authors' and to protect the fanwriters from possible copyright claims on part of these 'original authors.' Although the fannish tradition of preceding their stories with disclaimers already began with the first fanfiction fanzines of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this practice of acknowledging the intellectual property rights of the creators of the meta-text does "not have an effect on [the] potential legality" (Fiesler 752) of fanfiction and "[l]awyers would laugh till coffee came out of their noses" (Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 91) at the idea that disclaimers could actually protect fans from being taken to court over copyright infringement. The conclusive arguments of legal scholars that would consider fanfiction Fair Use (cf., for example, Tushnet, "Legal Fictions"; Tushnet, "Copyright"; Clerc 138-75; Fiesler; chapter 2) notwithstanding, studying disclaimers reveals, however,

[141] While none of these categories, except for slash, has ever been studied extensively—particularly with respect to serving as strategies of appropriation and as claims to power—, I selected disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF/RPS for this subchapter because they all occur far more frequently in fanfiction than most of the other categories available for study (almost every story features a disclaimer; both Mary Sue and RPF/RPS are quite popular genres) and, what is even more important, because as strategies they function very differently from Author's Notes and jargon. Moreover, Mary Sue and RPF/RPS also play a prominent role in chapter four, where I discuss the relevance of fannish writing in the meta-text of *Supernatural*.

An additional point I considered in my selection is the notion that all three of these categories can be regarded as being rather unique to fanfiction, which cannot necessarily be established for other fanfiction types of paratext and story genres: So tends, for example, the transformative stance of *hurt/comfort* stories or similar 'rewritings' (cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 162-76) to be comparable to mechanisms at work in adaptations, which often re-focus the adapted work to highlight minor characters, specific undertones, etc., and which have been the focus of previous scholarship (cf., for instance, Hutcheon 8-11, 118-19; Whelehan 8; Sanders 18-20).

that fanauthors are immediately aware of the fact that their paratext provides no viable defense against potential lawsuits, although many of them indeed phrase their disclaimers so as to "make a persuasive case for fan fiction as fair use" (Tushnet, Legal Fictions" 664; also cf. 664-78) by focusing on the story's transformation of the meta-text and its noncommercial nature. In the end, it needs to be said, however, that disclaimers, even if they do not succeed in legally protecting fans, "aren't worthless, but their worth lies elsewhere" (Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 91), i.e. not in the context of their initial intention.

This "elsewhere," I argue, can in fact be found in the completely opposite direction of giving attribution to the 'original authors,' i.e. disclaimers instead show their "worth" as means of fannish empowerment: My research suggests them to serve as a particular strategy fanauthors employ to confirm their agency within the archive and to assert their status as producers in their own right. While fan studies scholars have so far only mentioned disclaimers in reference to the legal situation of fanfiction (cf. Fiesler 749-53; Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus* 90-92; Tushnet, "Legal Fictions" 664-78; Katyal 471) or as evidence of the genre's possible origins in the literature of the European Middle Ages (cf. Pearson 12), little to none attempt has been made to study this form of paratext more closely. This becomes obvious, for instance, in the rather generalizing approach previous scholarship has applied to disclaimers, simply subsuming all of them under the label of *disclaimer* irrespective of their differences. In contrast, my own research of hundreds of disclaimers in the fandoms of *Supernatural*, *Star Wars*, and *Twilight* has uncovered at least eleven different patterns according to which fanwriters formulate their statements, ranging from what I call a full, or legal, disclaimer (cf. Shirky, *Cognitive* Surplus 91) that painstakingly enumerates all concerned parties, over disclaimers in which fans disclaim their ownership of parts of their story but not of the meta-text, to disclaimers that make fun of the practice in "creative surreality" (Saxey 208).[142] Without detailedly listing all of

[142] An example of a full disclaimer would be the one that celelorial gives for her *Twilight*-story "Enough," which reads in its entirety: "All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author. No money is being made from this work, and no copyright infringement is intended." In contrast, eureka twilighter disclaims a character in her story but does not make a statement in respect to the meta-text, writing that "Emmett belongs to SM [Stephenie Meyer], I just borrowed him to play in my world for a bit." Mocking the practice of attribution, many disclaimers also follow the pattern of archard-winchester's, who writes, "I used to own supernatural, the boys, the Impala and everything else on the show. But then, the men in white gave me my meds and I had to take them."

the subcategories here for reasons of space and readability,[143] I claim that each of those forms needs to be understood as an emphatic assertion of the fanauthors' authority, agency, and power—and also of ownership.

While I concede that there remains a considerable desideratum to fill for future research, my initial probes into the field of disclaimers suggest a substantial presence of fannish strategies of appropriation and claiming power. Some of the types of disclaimers I have discovered lend themselves particularly well to supporting this notion, with statements that allege that even the "perverse mind" of the creator of the meta-text could not have "come up with something" as "crack!tastic (though not in the good way) as [*Star Wars* character] Jar-Jar Binks" (anaer). In this way, the pattern I label 'making fun of the disclaimer' verbalizes even on a first glance that the producers no longer enjoy anything like a god-like status and instead turn into an object of ridicule: Attribution here degenerates into derision as fanauthors reduce the disclaimers' former purpose of protection from possible lawsuits to absurdity, mocking both the notion of needing a disclaimer as such and the creators of the meta-text themselves. In this way, KayValo87's disclaimer quoted at the beginning of this chapter provides a salient example of how *Supernatural*'s network of The CW presents no threat to the fanauthor, who "had this plan to buy" the actors from them but was deterred from doing that by mere trifles such as having no "way to contact CW." Other disclaimers engage in a similar, quasi carnivalesque transposition of the practice, when they use "laughter as a tool" or "invok[e] the ancient ritual of mocking at the deity" (Shave; also cf. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11-12) to scorn and subvert the alleged power of the producers. So writes Zaelriel that if anyone were "intent on suing me for any form of copyright, know that all you'll receive in the end is an overweight cat named Gizmo," and A Girl Named Logan asserts that "I actually do own Twilight. Seriously, you can get it at any good bookstore or supermarket."

Other types of disclaimers carve out a specific space for the fanauthors to participate in the archive, detailing exactly which parts of their story or the fictional universe in general they disclaim and which parts they claim to be their own. In paratexts

[143] Apart from the aforementioned three, I have found the following patterns: 1) partial attribution of the meta-text as a slightly more inexact variant of the full disclaimer; 2) negation of the fanauthor's ownership of the meta-text but no other attribution; 3) no mention of ownership at all but implying the fanauthor's not-ownership of the meta-text; 4) claiming the story for the fanauthor; 5) claiming parts of the story for the fanauthor; 6) paying tribute for the story to another fanauthor; 7) explicit emphasis on the non-commerciality of the story; 8) expressing ownership through being a fan of the meta-text. Examples of all of these types can be found in any fandom.

that announce a text as "[m]y story but I disclaim all the characters" (decipher.my.life) or that specifically exclude the meta-text from fannish textual production such as Mimi-Love-4ever's "I do not own Twilight. I do own the plot [of the story] and some characters though," an explicit struggle takes place between the fanauthors and the producers which configures the archive as a virtual battleground for ownership and agency. With the fans fighting for every letter and every minor detail, disclaimers can be found that assert fannish ownership of everything except for some lines of "[d]ialogue from the episode 'Crossroad Blues' [that] belon[g] to Eric Kripke and Sera Gamble" (paperstorm). Painstakingly, fans here seek to diminish the power of the creators of the meta-text, asserting their agency over anything they do not overtly disclaim. As such, they use their disclaimers to make clear that fanfiction, in the end, is their stories, their plots, and their characters, even though a producer may want to invoke copyright protection of the meta-text and its elements. Creating stories that are labeled as "purely fanfiction" (Links6), fanauthors accordingly instrumentalize their disclaimers to establish their power over the archive, fading out the authors of the meta-text by chipping away at their rights, step by step, letter by letter.

While in these types of disclaimers the producers of the meta-text may or may not be mentioned explicitly, another strategy of expressing fannish agency reveals itself in disclaimers that are specifically directed at the creators of the meta-text, who are either addressed by name or whose texts provide an overt foil the fanwriters define their writing in opposition to. This type of disclaimers specifically renounces the fans' ownership of the meta-text—but simultaneously affirms this non-ownership to be the very reason for the weaknesses and mistakes of the meta-text in order to substantiate the superiority of fannish writing and the power of its authors. So writes Annabel Fate Juliet Gaisras, "Anna does not own anything of Twilight! (thank goodness!) If she did the story would be A LOT better." Frequent in any fandom, this notion of 'if the fans owned the meta-text, everything would be better' opens up a wide space of fannish improvements and alternative versions: "If I did own" *Twilight*, *Star Wars*, or *Supernatural*, "I would have tossed Edward completely in favor of Jasper, Written Bella with more depth, and sure wouldn't have allowed Robert Pattinson to even be in the same state as the movie" (Princess Shido), … "many, many, MANY people would not have died as they did in the books and series" (Above the Winter Moonlight), … "then Dean/Cas would seriously be canon by now" (shinigami sakura2000). Clearly, these fans dissociate themselves from the

meta-text, which is perceived as poor, faulty, and not to the desires of the fanauthors, blaming its creators for its shortcomings. In this way, they employ their disclaimers to underline their power to improve the meta-text with their writing, subverting the fact that the producers try to assert property rights over 'their' texts to their own advantage.

What is more, I have found strategies of claiming power even in disclaimers that either mention the creators of the meta-text in their capacity as the copyright owners or that praise them for their writing. Similar to adaptations that explicitly establish a connection between themselves and the work (or the author) they adapt (cf. Diehl), fans create paratexts in which they seek to demonstrate their own agency by quasi aligning themselves with the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146), drawing authority from the presence of the producer who is reinstated as the creator of a text fandom loves and intensely engages with. Relying here on Susan Scafidi's thoughts about authenticity and its role in today's cultural production, I would argue that fanauthors specifically employ such disclaimers to make up for the fact that fanfiction cannot be copyrighted—and thus cannot receive traditional acknowledgement: Invoking a figure like George Lucas, Stephenie Meyer, or Eric Kripke, however, adds to their stories an air of "authenticity [or authority which] may thus compensate for an inability to secure or protect ownership of an embodied idea, creation, or design" (53). In this line of reasoning, fans assure their audience of their own writing by referencing a popular and beloved meta-text and its producers, placing themselves in a "position superior to all others with respect to the item in question" (54), i.e. assure the fannish community that fannish writing is superior to all other amateurish non-fannish writing due to the very presence of the meta-text and its producers. When preciousfairymom80, for instance, composes a disclaimer that says, "I fall at the feet of the Goddess that is Stephenie Meyers. Her brilliance, my playthings," she first of course identifies Meyer as an 'Author-Goddess'; nevertheless her wording of "[h]er brilliance, my playthings" establishes an immediate link between the "Goddess" and the fan's own writing, enabling a transfer of both "brilliance" and the Author-God's agency to her own story. Admiration and attribution here serve as specific strategies to elevate the genre of fanfiction, "much the way," Scafidi writes, "a German academic might invoke his or her *Doktorvater*" to establish his/her power by "tracing their own apprenticeshi[p] back" to its origins (123). Even though they seemingly have the fan assume a posture of humility, in this fashion even prosaic disclaimers like "Star Wars is the property of George Lucas. This story is for entertainment purposes only. No

infringement of rights is intended" (SerendipityAEY) or "Supernatural, Dean and Sam Winchester are the property in part and whole of Eric Kripke and the CW" (ajn) can be read as ciphers for fannish agency and authority. Here, the fanauthors relate their power to the very fact that someone else created the meta-text, instrumentalizing a practice of attribution to assert their status as producers in their own right.[144]

As I have shown over the last few pages, disclaimers therefore present another wide field of the fans' strategic assertion of their claims, their power, and their agency. Numerous different subcategories transform the disclaimers' original purpose in order to enable fans to "implicitly argue why they should be allowed to write" (Saxey 208)—and, I would add, to argue not only why they should be "allowed," but also that they have the *right* to write. As such, disclaimers serve a much different function than has been commonly acknowledged in previous scholarship on fanfiction, with many of its facets still open to be discovered. This paratexual form may present one of the most intricate and interesting areas of the genre for future study, since it is here where fans and producers encounter each other in a rather tightly circumscribed textual space to negotiate concepts of authority, authorship, and agency. Even my brief survey reveals that disclaimers in fact constitute a chance for fans to affirm the genre's position in the interplay of the hegemonial media industry and the participatory democratic archive as they contain distinct strategies of fannish gatekeeping. Expressing fannish empowerment in the inherently intermediate situation of disclaimers, Heart Torn Out, for example, writes therefore, "Don't own Supernatural. But i will. One day, the fangirls and I will storm Eric Kripke' house and make him give the rights to us! Till then…"

[144] Apart from Scafidi's work, my argumentation here was also influenced by Karen Diehl's article "Once Upon an Adaptation: Traces of the Authorial on Film," where she points out that posters of movie adaptations of literature often feature an overt trace of the adapted book such as a depiction of its cover: The presence of the book becomes a "visual prompter that metonymically indicate[s] the presence of the author" (90) to validate or legitimize the movie. Similarly, disclaimers like the above also "indicat[e] the presence of the author" and may thus lend weight to the fanfiction story they accompany.

Moreover, I also base my argumentation on what Manuel Broncano writes in his analysis of Herman Melville's *Israel Potter*, where he claims that "[a]ny study of the novel must necessarily start with the dedication that precedes it" since that is "the first sign of the subversive structure of the text" (495). Even though I would not necessarily characterize fanfiction as being as fully subversive as some of the first generation fan studies scholars did (cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; also cf. Cyber Echoes; Tosenberger, "'epic"; Parrish, "Metaphors"), I would nevertheless relate the fans' 'dedication' of the story to the creators of the meta-text in abovementioned types of disclaimers to the subversion Broncano detects in *Israel Potter*. Fanfiction may be "based on the original creation of E. Kripke," but it is nevertheless a "*transformative* work of fiction" (deangirl1; my emphasis).

"Till then," fans would probably add, 'we write fanfiction.' With the genre establishing fans as democratic participants, who seek to enforce the producers' acknowledgement and their listening without needing "the rights," fanauthors, however, do not only compose paratexts that verbalize very explicitly the fannish claims to power but they certainly also use their stories to express their demands for increased agency and participation. While the practice of fanfiction writing as a whole has long been regarded as a resistant or empowering act, the stories themselves have mostly evaded scholarly attention despite the fact that the various genres can be read as powerful statements of fannish agency and authority. Although research in this field was already initiated by Jenkins's subchapter "Ten Ways to Rewrite a Television Show" in his *Textual Poachers* (162-77), subsequent literature has mainly disregarded this catalog and only recognized slash stories, which Jenkins lists as an example of "Eroticization" (175-77), as a fannish claim to power. Conceding that slash represents a particularly fascinating topic of research due to its interplay of sex, gender, and society and, at that, one that is considered unique to fanfiction (Woledge, "Intimatopia" 98), I nonetheless find that the genre is no longer understudied and needs not necessarily become the focus of another work on fanfiction. Rather, this subchapter intends to shed light on the little studied genres of Mary Sue and RPF stories, since my perusal of a large number of diverse texts from these genres has made me to recognize patterns that speak for their status as a distinct strategy fans employ to insist on their producerly power, i.e. their power to shape and participate in the archive and the meta-text.

Participation in the archive seems to be the crucial point and purpose of so-called *Mary Sue* stories, aka self-inserts in which the fanauthors create a fictional persona of themselves that enters the story as a character, who is then generically referred to as Mary Sue.[145] Although Mary Sues—or, in their rare male forms of *Marty Stus* or *Gary Stus*—may also be "intended as proxies for the reader" ("Mary Sue")[146] or may be fully fictional

[145] While such character types are called Mary Sue, the specific character in the specific story, however, tends to have a "distinctive, symbolic, or descriptive" name or one that is "uncannily similar to that of her creator" (Pflieger), be that her real name or her screenname. A typical example of a Mary Sue character would therefore be Quetzalxochitl Earlywine as the protagonist of quetzalxochitlearlywine's story "White Walls."

[146] More frequently than in Mary Sues, the reader enters the meta-text in stories with a second person point of view. Although not allowed on *FanFiction.Net*, these texts revolve around an open and unspecified—usually female—"you," i.e. a Bakhtinian "empty signifier" (cf., for example, *Mythologies* 109-59), and thus serve as "a way to get the reader to feel as though they are the main character" (PimpedOutGreenEars).

avatars for their authors akin to self-insert characters in, for instance, role-playing games, the Mary Sues of fanfiction are foremost characterized by what Jenkins calls a distinct "autobiographical intent" (*Textual Poachers* 173): With the Mary Sue character often containing traces of the real lives of the fanauthors, even when they transform a character already present in the meta-text into a Mary Sue or present an unrealistic ideal, these stories thus have fans—or, rather, their fictional avatars—come as "recruits aboard the Enterprise" (*Textual Poachers* 171), become the love interests of Edward (cf. Illavyn412), serve as knights in the Jedi Order (cf. Kiila Domina), or sit in the back seat of the Winchesters' Chevrolet Impala (cf. superwhogleek). In short, Mary Sues are stories in which the fanauthor herself participates via an avatar in the archive and the meta-text; the fact that in this way she personally intervenes in the plot, alters characters, and even tends to become the "center of the known universe" (Pflieger) makes her a powerful fannish statement in regard to the fans' agency over the text itself.

The term *Mary Sue* was first coined in 1973 by fanauthor Paula Smith, who recounts in a 2011 interview how she, a frequent contributor to *Star Trek* fanzines, noticed

> that every Trek zine at the time had a main story about this adolescent girl who is the youngest yeoman or lieutenant or captain ever in Starfleet. She makes her way onto the Enterprise and the entire crew falls in love with her. They then have adventures, but the remarkable thing was that all the adventures circled around this character. Everybody else in the universe bowed down in front of her. Also she usually had some unique physical identifier—odd-colored eyes or hair—or else she was half-Vulcan.

Prompted by this pattern, she went on to write the story "A Trekkie's Tale"[147] in her fanzine *Menagerie 2*, which "retold the story of that quintessential Mary Sue."

[147] Today, Smith's "A Trekkie's tale" can be found in various spaces online. To illustrate my subsequent line of argumentation and in lieu of longer—in other words, rather unquotable—stories, I give it here in full (as reprinted in the aforementioned interview):

> "Gee, golly gosh, gloriosky," thought Mary Sue as she stepped on the bridge of the *Enterprise.* "Here I am, the youngest lieutenant in the Fleet—only 15-1/2 years old."
> Captain Kirk came up to her. "Oh, Lieutenant, I love you madly. Will you come to bed with me?"
> "Captain! I am not that kind of girl!"
> "You're right. And I respect you for it. Here, take over the ship while I go for some coffee for us."
> Mr. Spock came onto the bridge. "What are you doing in the Command Seat, Lieutenant?"
> "The Captain told me to."
> "Flawlessly logical. I admire your mind."

Although a "parody," the name of her main character—Lieutenant Mary Sue—quickly caught on and gave a label to the whole genre, which is still characterized by many of the archetypal traits of "A Trekkie's Tale" and its Mary Sue precursors it satirizes.

Smith's story is largely responsible for the fact that today there exist two definitions of a Mary Sue: The first, more extensive one, encompasses all stories with a non-meta-textual female character who "holds a place open in the story for the [fan]author" (Pflieger); the second, more well-known one that directly builds on "A Trekkie's Tale," refers only to stories with an avatar of the fanauthor who "is perfect in every sense of the word" ("Mary Sue"), "takes up too much room" (Smith), and is thus considered the "most reviled character type in media fan fiction" (Pflieger). Despite controversy among fans over these definitions and even though the latter is the object of much ridicule within fandom, which already made Bacon-Smith in 1992 call these stories the "most universally denigrated genre" (*Enterprising Women* 94),[148] my research has nevertheless prompted me to consider all kinds of Mary Sues a fannish strategy of empowerment that evidences the fanauthors' participation within the meta-text and their agency: Beyond the fact that all Mary Sues feature the fanwriter's avatar—and thus quasi the fanwriter herself—as an agent within the archive, who actively shapes and contributes

> Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott beamed down with Lt. Mary Sue to Rigel XXXVII. They were attacked by green androids and thrown into prison. In a moment of weakness Lt. Mary Sue revealed to Mr. Spock that she, too, was half Vulcan. Recovering quickly, she sprung the lock with her hairpin and they all got away safely back to the ship.
> But back on board, Dr. McCoy and Lt. Mary Sue found out that the men who had beamed down were seriously stricken by the jumping cold robbies, Mary Sue less so. While the four officers languished in Sick Bay, Lt. Mary Sue ran the ship, and ran it so well she received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Vulcan Order of Gallantry and the Tralfamadorian Order of Good Guyhood.
> However, the disease finally got to her and she fell fatally ill. In the Sick Bay, as she breathed her last, she was surrounded by Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott all weeping unashamedly at the loss of her beautiful youth and youthful beauty, intelligence, capability and all around niceness. Even to this day her birthday is a national holiday on the *Enterprise.*

[148] Since the label *Mary Sue* has become almost synonymous with the second definition, i.e. the "denigrated" idealized version of the Mary Sue character, fanauthors are usually advised to avoid writing Mary Sue stories. For this purpose, various Litmus tests are available online that fans can use to see if they have created a too 'perfect' Mary Sue; the "Universal Mary Sue Litmus Test," for instance, provides 138 questions that examine a character for frequent Mary Sue characteristics and result in a score that rates his/her 'Mary-Sue-ness.'

Moreover, idealization has become such a defining feature of Mary Sues that even characters from the meta-text who are considered too perfect are sometimes labeled *Mary Sue*—or, rather, *Canon Sue*; the most widely known of those is probably Captain Kirk from *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

to its content, it is actually even more so the Mary Sue's very perfectness that supports the fans' claims since her character allows them to transcend the limitations of a 'regular' character in order to emphasize her presence in the fictional universe. As such she does not only "bear an uncanny resemblance to her [fannish] creator" but she is also "stronger, wittier, sexier, friendlier—and without the glasses and bad skin" (Chaney and Liebler 52). She is no longer a teenager, teacher, secretary, doctor, student, or housewife, but she is, as Pat Pflieger summarily characterizes her in her essay on "150 Years of Mary Sue," "physically striking," "astoundingly good at her job, or, indeed, at any skill she cares to cultivate"; her "background is exotic," she is the "youngest hero in the story—unless she's the oldest"; she is "the toughest character who ever lived," and "[t]ragedy dogs" her since she has had a "tragic love," was an "orphan" or "has experienced the unthinkable" so that her "past is […] too dreadful to be described."

Parodied in "A Trekkie's Tale," this Mary Sue is everyone but the average Jane; she is larger than life. In the end, she is an exceptionalized and idealized projection of the fanauthor whose perfection symbolizes her power: The "truest mark of a Mary Sue," concludes Paula Smith accordingly, "is not how she's described and what she does, but the effect the sheer fact of her existence in the story has on the other characters" (e-mail qtd. in Pflieger). The text with all its elements—plot, characters, relationships, etc.—revolves around the Mary Sue; she is the focal point of all developments and the one character that exerts the most influence on everything and everyone around her. A means of the fanauthor's self-insertion into the story, she makes the fan a powerful agent who reigns supreme over the text. Even the fact that she tends to die "in a beautiful scene, having saved everyone from everything" (Pflieger) supports my reading of the Mary Sue as an empowering strategy: As Pflieger states so succinctly, Mary Sue "never fails; having died, she can't go on to accidentally do something stupid or unnoble or unvirtuous. Nor can she become unbeautiful. And […] who loves her won't have time to fall out of love." Without ever having to endure the loss of perfection, Mary Sue again reinforces the power she has over the entire text: Death epitomizes the infallibility and the centrality of the (avatar of the) fanauthor's presence in the story—her absence causes everyone in the fictional universe, including, of course, the protagonists of the meta-text, to mourn her and to miss her: Fictionalized as a Mary Sue, the fanwriter turns into an integral part of the archive.

While not all Mary Sue stories feature either all of those stereotypes or are as blatantly obvious as Heart Keeper's "Star Wars REDONE" that she summarizes as, "One summer, two Star Wars fans get sucked into that galaxy far, far away and become part of the unfolding events," many texts portray the fans' self-inserts as vital to the plot of the story and highly transformative of the meta-text. In *Supernatural*, "Sam and an old friend"—i.e. the Mary Sue character called Raine—"play key roles in a prophecy involving the Second Coming and the downfall of Lucifer" (ContagiousButterfly) and in *Twilight*, where Mary Sue is a particularly frequent character, Bella is either transformed into a Mary Sue herself as the above quoted story by Illavyn412 shows or acquires, for example, a twin sister, who "looked exactly like her, but acted differently, lived differently," with whom she is "suddenly reuinited at the ages of 17" (Skyrose Nightfall).[149] In these and similar stories, the fanauthor in the form of the Mary Sue is the virtual center of the text, performing various roles that have them "alter [the meta-text] to where I am the main character" (littlelottie95): Mary Sue, as many paratexts evidence, becomes a "plausible way i could get into" (Red 921) the meta-text and transform it in a very personal way.

Either as a mere self-insert or, even more so, as an idealized self-insert, Mary Sue thus embodies the empowerment of the fanwriter, who—just like Mary Sue herself—is no longer a passive consumer but becomes an active participant: Mary Sue "*does*, not just simply *exists*. She slays, she runs a starship, she types, she wields a sword" (Pflieger; also cf. Chander and Sunder 608-09); the fans write, expand, alter, change text. Via their Mary Sue avatars, the fanauthors, I argue, transcend the dichotomy between passivity and activity, between recipient and producer. In emphasizing the aspect of '*doing*' in this fictionalized version of themselves, fans negate their traditional role as a docile audience that "simply *exists*," thus questioning and overthrowing conventional power relations that are inherently dependent on the intact binary of passive and active: As fictional Mary Sues, fans are active agents in the archive; as fanauthors, they intend to become the Mary

[149] Similar to RPF/RPS stories later in this chapter, quoting lengthy excerpts from Mary Sues would take up too much space in the frame of this dissertation. Instead, I suggest searching for the term *Mary Sue* on *FanFiction.Net* to find elaborate examples that show the Mary Sue as a "persona of myself" (BlackRose629), as an exceptional character who has "two powers, telekinesis and mental location, the ability to simply know where places and people are," and "cannot be killed" (LittletonPace), and as the center of another character's life for whom they "would do everything and anything to make sure they were safe" (Rain Kenobi).

Sues of the production process of their objects of fandom: Those who have an "effect" on the story by the "sheer fact of [their] existence" (Smith qtd. in Pflieger).

Still very much an understudied genre in fanfiction writing, Mary Sue stories accordingly serve as an act of appropriation and empowerment, which permits the fanauthors to transcend the boundary separating the textual world from the non-textual: In the form of a (perfect) avatar, they descend into the pre-existent fictional universe and transform it according to their plans and purposes because they "really want nothing more in life" (Illavyn412). In this way, fanauthors demonstrate their participation in the meta-text, becoming agents that shape cultural goods and disregard hierarchical structures that would commit them to passivity and 'existence' instead of activity and 'doing.' Moreover, the fact that the latter indeed constitute one of the most significant aspects of the fannish identity can be observed in RPF/RPS, which is another genre of fanfiction writing to emphasize activity and which thus makes me read these stories as a strategic affirmation of the fanauthors' agency: Contrary to Mary Sues, which still depend on a pre-existent fictional universe, the fans' productive power, I claim, finds an even more emphatic representation in the genre of RPF/RPS, i.e. in stories that are based on a fictionalized version of real people, and for which fans actually *create* a meta-text of their own.

Briefly defined as "fanfiction written about actual people, rather than characters in a book, movie, or TV show," RPF and RPS stories[150] are a popular subgenre of fanfiction that has been "around since at least the late 1960s, growing […] in conjunction with stories about fictional characters" ("RPF"). Starting with the appearance of Gene Roddenberry, creator of the *Star Trek* universe, in one of the stories printed in the third issue of the fanzine *Spockanalia* (1968), fanauthors have not only engaged in composing stories about the fictional characters featured in their objects of fandom but have also written fanfiction about the cast and crew of their favorite movies or TV shows or the singers in their favorite bands, focusing on the people "[b]ehind the scenes" (Knives'Ghostwriter). Despite the fact that RPF is somewhat in line with other non-fanfiction genres such as historical fiction, which also feature "actual people," the fanauthors have long harbored "ethical and moral qualms" as a result from their "writing fan fiction about real people, even when those people"—as more or less well-known

[150] As Real Person Slash, RPS is a subcategory of Real Person Fiction (RPF), albeit one that is so popular that it predates its hypernym. Since the latter, however, encompasses more stories, I mostly use the label *RPF* in the following.

celebrities—"have very public personas" ("RPF"). Determining the genre's early years, these conflicts made it lead a rather obscured life up until the late 1990s and early 2000s when the first major fandoms formed in the wake of *LoTRiPS*, i.e. RPF/RPS about the actors starring in the *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Today, however, "the practice, although not universally accepted, is more or less condoned" (Coppa, "History" 58) and RPF has become notorious in contemporary fanfiction: Many fandoms have now spawned a rich RPF section, although it remains one of the genre's most disputed forms; even in the early 2010s, the question "whether writing any kind of fanfiction about real people is okay" or "just plain wrong" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 131; 134) has certainly not completely disappeared and surfaces from time to time in fannish discussions.[151]

Contrary to the attention fanauthors have devoted to RPF and its genre-inherent conflicts, scholars have as of yet given little consideration to this "most subversive element of fan fiction" (Busse, "Digital" 122). Apart from Kristina Busse and Katherine Larsen together with Lynn Zubernis, hardly any scholar has written on RPF, whose presence in fanfiction is much more manifold and diverse than their research areas of boy band RPF and *Supernatural* RPF suggest.[152] While this thesis cannot cover the ground three generations of fan studies scholars have largely neglected in the past years and decades, I nevertheless want to use this space to suggest a new reading of RPF that eradicates discussions of the potential moral implications of the genre as it was previously understood. As RPF, according to the fanauthors themselves, "is fiction not real life" (starglow71), the genre, I argue, needs to be fundamentally reframed—not as stories about 'real people' but as stories that enable fans to create a meta-text of their own: In RPF, fanauthors do not write on the basis of a pre-existing meta-text but instead create a "'collaborative fantasy space,' from which the writers can draw freely to produce their

[151] In consequence of the long debates over RPF in the early 2000s, *FanFiction.Net*, for instance, banned those stories in 2002 and has since then prohibited them in their "Guidelines." Nevertheless, RPF can be found on the website easily and frequently, even if not with the same abundance as on the Internet in general, where many spaces focus on "redrawing the lives of the famous and the infamous to create online series that attract millions of readers" (Yarrow).

[152] Busse's work on RPF has mainly focused on what she calls *popslash*, i.e. stories that slash the singers in boy bands such as **NSYNC* (cf., for instance; "Digital"; "'I'm jealous'"; "My Life"; also cf. Pahati). Moreover, Zubernis and Larsen have discussed the significant presence of RPF in the *Supernatural* fandom, where even the actors are aware of the existence of these stories about 'themselves' (*Fandom* 116-229; also cf. Flegel and Roth on the different patterns in *Supernatural* RPF and *FPF*/Fictional Person Fiction). Moreover, fans have written copiously on RPF, devoting significantly more attention to this genre than academics have: The website *Fanfic Symposium* alone features at least ten essays that discuss various issues from the legal implications of RPF to the ethic concerns of its writers.

fanfic characters" (Busse, "Digital" 113)—in short, they do not only expand the meta-text into an archive but *produce both meta-text and archive* in an act of empowerment.

"This is just a RPS this is fiction! Not real," writes Knives'Ghostwriter in her disclaimer for her story "Parlor Tricks" set "[b]ehind the scenes of Supernatural"; Writing4Roses proclaims that "[a]ll real persons mentioned in this one-shot [about *Twilight* actor Robert Pattinson] are purely dramatized and fictional," and Randy and Anne Golden add that their *Star Wars* RPF is not based on "any real personalities living, dead, zombiefied, or otherwise existing transubstantiationally" because their characters "exist in an alternate universe entirely separate from our own." Poignantly, these and other fanwriters insist on the difference between 'reality' and 'fiction,' declaring that their *Real* Person Fiction is wholly *fictional*[153]: With their paratexts, they explicitly institute and highlight this dichotomy, asserting their own agency in constructing a fictional universe innately independent from pre-existing reality. Accordingly, RPF writers do not only "stress the difference between real people and their public personas," as Zubernis and Larsen claim (*Fandom* 133) or engage in an act of writing that "strip[s] away the layers of performance" (Busse, "'I'm jealous'" 259; also cf. 254-55), but create entirely fictional characters who may bear the names of celebrities but have otherwise little in common with either the "real people" or their "performance" of their "public personas." In consequence, as starglow71 asserts, they are "totally open to being used in Fan Fiction stories."

Contrary to the debates about the ethics of RPF, the genre thus does not necessarily have to be embedded in this moral context; instead, focus should rather shift towards what Busse has called "[c]anon formation in RPS" ("My Life" 214): Clearly, as she acknowledges, the establishment of a fictional universe is here "more complicated than in most media- and book-based fandoms" ("My Life" 214), since there is no meta-text fans can work with and transform. Although RPF fanauthors may use material about the celebrities from interviews, conventions, or other sources to inform their fictional RPF character, their statements suggest that, in the end, they "purposefully use [this] real-life information to create fictional worlds inhabited by fictional protagonists," so that the

[153] While I certainly acknowledge that what I call here reality is certainly constructed as well, at least according to postmodern theory, and might thus also be referred to as fiction, the two concepts are certainly not entirely interchangeable. Accordingly, I nevertheless differentiate between 'real people,' i.e. those with a corporeal presence in the material world, and fictional characters, i.e. textual representations of persons within literature/fanfiction.

characters are "ultimately fictional and constructed" (Busse, "My Life" 214). Or, in the words of the popular writer felisblanco, whose RPS about the *Supernatural* actors Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki can easily be considered some of the most widely-read stories in the fandom:

> I'm writing a Doors!timestamp scene [for an *AU*/Alternate Universe story] with Jared listening to Jensen singing so I plugged in my headphones and listened to [the actor] Jensen Ackles sing *Angeles* to be able to better describe his voice. And if I ever needed supporting evidence that RPS is as much fiction as any other fanfiction (not that I do) I got it there. Because Jensen Ackles sounds nothing like Doors!Jensen. […] They don't sound alike because they don't feel alike because they're not the same person, they […] have different souls. And this is the same for non-AU RPS [i.e. stories in which the characters are actors on the *Supernatural* set], those Jensens might be closer to the real deal but each and every one is still different from the next. […]
> People who don't write or read fan fiction sometimes ask what can possibly be fun about writing the same characters over and over again, why we don't rather create our own. Well duh, because they're not the same characters. […] Even if they're […] based on the same model and largely on that characters/actors manners, each has his own soul. So yes, I consider my Jensens/Deans and Jared/Sams my own, even if they are based on someone else. (8 Jan. 2014)

The actor Jensen Ackles, felisblanco affirms, is "not the same person" as her RPF Jensen Ackles; they "have different souls," although they are both grounded in the corporeal presence of the person and his "manners." Without doubt, this fanauthor therefore claims the RPF characters of Jensen and Jared as "my own"—just like she considers the *Supernatural* characters of Dean and Sam "my own." Together with hundreds of thousands of other fanwriters online, she ostentatiously does not make any difference between the fictional characters in the TV show and the fictional characters of its actors she brings to life in a powerful act of creation: Contrary to its common definition, her statement makes clear that RPF is not at all about "actual people" and is "as much fiction as any other fanfiction."

With the RPF characters detached from the real lives of the celebrities, as felisblanco and her fellow fanwriters time and again verify, writing RPF fanfiction is thus independent from available public information about actors or singers, i.e. the genre no longer relies on a pre-existing meta-text that would provide an impetus for the stories; instead, the mere fact of someone appearing in connection to an object of fandom suffices for fans to write. As such, it is not only that ethical discussions have actually little place within RPF but the absence of a conventional meta-text from outside of fandom makes the genre have far-reaching implications about the fanauthors' agency. As there simply is no

meta-text populated by 'real people', fans demonstrate in RPF stories that they have dispensed with any form of non-fannish meta-text; rather, they produce a distinctly fannish meta-text through the very act of their writing: Even though tidbits from the media sometimes appear in this fannish meta-text that accrues from the collected stories and their often much-repeated elements, fanauthors nevertheless construct their very own fictional universe that exists entirely separate from reality and the 'real people' in it. So confirms, for example, Jared Padalecki when asked about RPF, that fans are only interested in their own "Jared that is Sam Winchester" but that they "do not want to know *me*" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 187; my emphasis), i.e. that they have no interest in knowing the 'real' Jared or even the 'public' Jared.

RPF may therefore be the only genre of fanfiction that exists without a non-fannish meta-text and whose characters can thus become the fans' own to a degree that surpasses any fannish ownership claims in respect to other fictional characters. While fanauthors often consider the latter, i.e. *FPF*/*FPS* characters in Fictional Person Fiction/Slash who reference a media-based meta-text, to be leading a "fleshed-out and replete" existence already in the respective meta-text—which makes them "too fictional, too real"—, lobelia321, for instance, argues with Barthes (cf., for example, *Mythologies* 109-59) that

> [r]ps characters, by contrast, are total chimaerae. They are wraiths […] They are insubstantial; they are surface; they are the ultimate screens for our projections. […] For me, […] an rps character is so much emptier as a signifier than an fps character that I might as well call him an empty signifier. [...] We then fill up this character with signifieds and turn him into a full and replete sign. So the lee-way we have is so much greater in rps. […] This is why, to me, rps after my long sojourn in fps, seems very liberating. […] The sense of "just make it all up" is […] much stronger in rps than in fps. Fps has already "made it all up". […] Rps is made by nobody. The only people who do the making up are we.

Affirming the absence of a non-fannish meta-text since "nobody" from outside of fandom is involved in 'making' RPS, lobelia321 emphatically concludes that here the fanauthors are the "only people who do the making up" and so testifies to the agency they feel to have in the genre. Their activity is not only "very liberating" but gives them the power to use the "insubstantial" person on the red carpet or on the stage as an "empty signifier" they can fill with substance and meaning. In short, she asserts both the dissociation of RPF with 'reality' and the productive power of the fanauthors who "do the making up"—who transform "chimaerae" into "full and replete sign[s]," i.e. who create a text, an archive, and a meta-text via the act of writing fanfiction.

In the end, RPF is thus a powerful assertion of the fanauthors' creative and productive agency: First, they write stories that turn empty signifiers—the 'real' person's name—into replete signifiers that humanize the 'name' into a fully formed fictional character with a life, background, circle of family and friends, and a career,[154] thereby engaging in an act of creation that questions one of the most predominant prejudices against fanfiction that posits the genre as less imaginative than 'original' fiction (cf. Meyer qtd. in Genet). Moreover, they write not only disconnected stories but truly create an entire multi-layered meta-text of their own that is independent from what they may know about the public persona of the respective celebrity: Their writing has them establish a fanon that assumes the function of the meta-text, i.e. provides them with a certain universe and certain 'facts' that are freely available to be used—or, for that matter, to be disregarded.[155] Contrary to other genres of fanfiction, RPF is therefore a form of writing that ultimately gives control to the fans: Neither the star him-/herself nor the media industry have any power over the texts fans produce; instead fanwriters demonstrate their agency in creating both their own meta-text and their own archive, ignoring what people and forces outside of fandom may claim. Accordingly, even *Supernatural* creator Eric Kripke needs to acknowledge that RPF fiction nullifies the boundaries the media industry tends to protect their texts with: "Even though the character is nominally 'me,'" he says about *Supernatural* RPF, "I have no ownership over it, it belongs to the [fan]writer" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 215).

Fanauthors, even the producers of the meta-text must nowadays concede, can claim ownership, can claim power and agency. Their texts position them as an authoritative force that resists being characterized as passive, consumerist, or as a mere recipient of the

[154] Based on the assumption that boy band RPF is based on the public self of the respective singers, Busse would rather argue for RPF to "*re*humaniz[e] the celebrities by inventing back stories and inner lives" where there is only a public "star stereotype […] perpetuated by the media" ("'I'm jealous'" 256; my emphasis): Fanauthors, in her line of thinking, thus "present celebrities as fully formed, intricate, and interesting characters, in opposition to their often one-dimensional media portrayals" ("My Life" 214). Although Busse's reasoning may have its merits, I rather take my reading of RPF from the fans' own statements which deny any links between their fiction and 'reality,' including whichever "one-dimensional media portrayals." After all, they say RPF "doesn't depict reality in any way" (amja7578).

[155] This act of "[c]anon formation," to recall Busse's term ("My Life" 214), does not only cover the protagonists of each RPF fandom but creates an entire fictional universe with different layers, peripheral characters, and manifold details as to setting, background, etc. In their comparative study of *Supernatural* FPS and RPS, Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth accordingly affirm that the latter works with as multidimensional a fanon as the respective FPF archive: RPF, they write for instance, surrounds Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles with a rather fixed community of friends, (former) girlfriends, and family, with the personalities of all these characters "fairly set" within the RPF meta-text.

"'message' of the Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146). Instead, their writing—both in the form of stories and their accompanying paratexts—features strategies through which fans both establish and demonstrate their agency and which permit them to redefine themselves as powerful producers and the true owners of the archive. While RPF may arguably be seen as the "ultimate instantiation" (Busse, "Digital" 111) of fannish power since it has fans produce the meta-text itself, all the different strategies studied in this chapter illustrate that fanfiction indeed constitutes an "empowering postmodern act that gives the fans agency over an industry seeking to pacify its consumers and maintain the status quo of power relations" (Busse, "Digital" 111). The fans' own statements, which I purposefully include in large number to give the fannish voices the space they demand and to show the argumentative power they wield, testify to the strategic gatekeeping fanauthors engage in with their Author's Notes, fanspeak, disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF. Each of those categories enables them to express their power in different forms, so that fans instrumentalize the figure and role of the author, their communal collaboration and cohesion, their status as experts in texts, values, and language, their reinterpretation of the disclaimer, their self-insertion into the archive, and their creation of a meta-text of their own to affirm their agency and to reinforce their participation.

Serving to reconceptualize fans as powerful agents in an archontic production of texts, all the forms of fannish writing mentioned here ultimately substantiate the fannish aspiration to transfer their democratic principles of the collaboration of multiple voices, the representation of manifold opinions, and the equality of all contributions and members of a community to the media industry. Although each of these textual categories demands more research—in particular, the latter three addressed in this subchapter—, they all sustain being read as strategies of the fans' empowerment that cannot be confined to the genre of fanfiction but extends beyond it to the production of the meta-text and our contemporary media landscape at large. The function of the fannish means of gatekeeping is too important, their presence too significant, and the patterns to be found throughout several fandoms in thousands of stories too obvious for them to be disregarded: After all, it is not for nothing that fanauthors devote much time, space, energy, and creative power to composing paratexts and stories that announce their claims to an audience that includes both their fellow fans and, both symbolically and de facto, non-fans inclusive of the producers. In the end, I accordingly argue, fanauthors strategically use their writing to underline their participatory culture and to express their claim to reshaping the media

industry and its rather one-voiced production along their own democracy of production. Their texts are replete with instances through which fans affirm their status as authors and their productive power, no matter if they enter and shape the archive in the form of Mary Sue, if they compose their texts in the distinct role of the fanauthor—i.e. in a hybrid identity that accumulates the power of the god-like author, the dead author, and collaborative authorship—, or if they invoke their superiority as fannish experts via fanspeak: "We, the fans" (hazel-3017) are agents who engage in a grassroots bottom-up revolution of traditional structures and dichotomies of passivity and activity.

Substantiated through the categories included in this thesis, the fanauthors' claims to power and agency therefore present themselves as a multidimensional, many-layered, and global feature of fannish writing. While my discussion of disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF intends to give new impulses for much-needed further research in these areas and does not maintain to be comprehensive, it shows nonetheless that the strategies fans employ are both powerful and, in addition, present in many, if not all, textual categories to be found in fanfiction. Reading this type of paratext and the two story genres as persuasive means of fannish gatekeeping essentially supplements my findings in the chapters devoted to Author's Notes and fannish jargon, which, as a particularly significant paratextual category and as a feature that appears in all paratextual categories, have proven exemplary for how fans reconstruct themselves via their writing: Clearly, A/Ns and fanspeak demonstrate the mechanisms fanwriters employ in undermining the hegemony of the media industry and its producers, giving explicit voice to the new role fans seek in processes of production. Repositioning fans as powerful *fanauthors* and as a powerful, knowledgeable community, they conclusively establish that fandom is no longer satisfied with being defined from the outside—with being identified as mindless consumers who buy overpriced DVD boxes and do not question what they receive. Instead, fans redefine *themselves* through their own writing as producers who take part and shape the production of cultural goods. Ultimately, fanfiction has always been geared towards revolutionizing the power relations in the media landscape and the fans' strategies of empowerment help them to attain this goal. After all, as this chapter shows, "we, the fans" are fanauthors, a community of experts, owners of the archive, agents in the fictional universe, and producers of the meta-text.

The tangible effects this new role of the fans as multiple agents has on the media industry constitute the subject of my last chapter that studies the presence of fans—or,

rather, the efficacy of their claims—in the actual production of a specific meta-text. To substantiate my conclusion that fans have truly initiated a revolution in the power relations of our contemporary media landscape, I deem it more than necessary to take a look at the other side, i.e. to focus on a meta-text that reflects the fanauthors' empowerment and thus corroborates that the activity of fanfiction writing has genuine consequences on forces outside of fandom and, in particular, within the media industry fannish strategies are directed at. In expansion of my research in this past chapter, I selected the TV show of *Supernatural*, which has not only been a forerunner in terms of acknowledging and reacting to the presence of an active and vocal fanbase but which lends itself particularly well to this kind of study since it actually can, as a TV show that is still on air, incorporate fannish activity in its meta-text and react to new developments in fandom in new episodes. Via illustrating the presence of fanfiction, its authors, and its genres in the meta-text of the show and shedding light on the dialogue the creative team and the fanauthors engage in, the following chapter thus substantiates the claim that the fans have both power "over" the show and the power "to do" something in the show (Ross 72) as a result of their production of transformative fan-works—that *Supernatural* may prove to be a new— and more demoractic—form of making TV since, in the words of Mia Nina, it indeed "transplant[s] true blue fanfiction to the screen."

4. *Supernatural*—Fanfiction 'transplanted to the screen': Fannish Agency in a Democratic Revolution of Making TV

4.1 "truly partnered with the fans": Studying *Supernatural* and Its Fandom

> "Now, it's not unusual for fans to write fiction about their favorite TV shows. It's *very* unusual for TV shows to write scripts about their fans. *Supernatural*'s writers intentionally incorporate the show's fandom back into the program's plot. So in the show, there's a series of books, called *Supernatural*, based on the adventures of the main characters. The *Supernatural* books have fans... on the show, *Supernatural*. Those fictional fans hold *Supernatural* fan conventions, where they dress up as the main characters on the show…while interacting with the characters on the show."
>
> Ulaby, "Fans of *Supernatural* Redefine TV Success."

> "Kripke and Co. really know, understand and most importantly appreciate fandom for all its weird and sometimes downright disturbing awesomeness. How many tv show creators know their fan base as inside and out as Kripke and Co. know us? Not many I am certain. But that's the great thing about loving a show like Supernatural, the writers and producers are just as into us as we are into them."
>
> Eden Winchester, "4-18: 'The Monster At The End Of This Book.'"

> "I'm a huge fan of fanfiction. I think it's a wonderful art form where people get to write and extrapolate upon existing stories and do their thing […]. It's incredible and I love that in this new media age where you're free to create on such a high level. It contributes to the mythology of the show very nicely. […] [Season six is] up to the fans. If the fans speak, then we're going to give them what they want. We owe it to the fans. We're only here because of the fans and the passion of the fanbase. They have spoken and made it clear to the people that run Warner Brothers that this show has a place on the air. We are truly partnered with the fans of the show. And we are listening. When the fans give feedback, we do what we can to incorporate those desires into the storytelling of the show. […] Eric Kripke does a great job ingesting and redefining the feedback we get along the way."
>
> McG, executive producer, qtd. in Bekakos.

Supernatural, these statements affirm, is "*very* unusual" since "[n]ot many" TV shows have producers that are "truly partnered with the fans." Obviously, critics, fans, and producers agree on the special status of the TV show *Supernatural* (*SPN*), with various voices citing the intense, intimate, and extraordinary relationship between its creators and its fanbase as the reason for their assessment: Neda Ulaby, in an article that recognizes the

effect fans and their activities begin to have on how success is measured in contemporary television making, mentions how "*very* unusual [it is] for TV shows to write scripts about their fans," referring to the by now almost infamous episodes of *Supernatural* that "intentionally incorporate" its fans, fanfiction, fan conventions, or any other part of "the show's fandom back into the program's plot." Fans, like Eden Winchester in his review of episode 4x18 "The Monster at the End of This Book,"[156] describe what a "great thing" it is to be a fan of a show whose producers "really know, understand and most importantly appreciate fandom," highlighting that *Supernatural* is different from other TV shows since it represents one of the "[n]ot many" whose "writers and producers are just as into us as we are into them." Most tellingly perhaps, even the creators of the meta-text[157] fall into line themselves, voicing, first, their appreciation of the fans and their activities and, secondly, acknowledging the fact that fans on *Supernatural* are far from mere consumers but are "truly partnered" with the showrunners: One of the show's executive producers, Joseph McGinty Nichol, known as McG, identifies as a "huge fan of fanfiction" and, as a representative of the entire creative team, asserts that "we are listening" to the fans and "do what we can to incorporate [their] desires into the storytelling of the show."

If it was not for this "increasingly reciprocal relationship between fans and producers" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 13), or, as supporting actor Matt Cohen calls it, this "special thing between the fans and the cast and crew on set and the creators behind the scenes" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196), *Supernatural*, whose first episode 1x01 "Pilot" aired on 13 September 2005, may well have remained a show like many others, got canceled long before its current eleventh season, or—at least—may have garnered less or a different kind of attention from both fans and scholars alike. Since it has, however, established itself over the years as "the poster child for meta episodes and

[156] Specifying the episode as *4x18 "The Monster at the End of This Book"* follows the format *[season number]x[episode number] "Title,"* which I use throughout this chapter whenever I first mention an episode. Afterwards, I either give the title or the number, the latter of which I also use to indicate whenever I quote from an episode in lieu of giving the entire title. In reference to other scholarship, I moreover forego pinpointing the precise time of the line uttered since, methodologically, my frame of analysis is the show as a whole and, in terms of practical use, most if not all scripts can easily be found online (at the *Supernatural Wiki*, for example).

[157] In this chapter, my terms *producers*/*creators*/*showrunners*/*creative team* are meant to include all members involved in creating the show, i.e. everyone from actors to directors, writers, members of the art department, and the (executive) producers themselves, since otherwise it would be quite impossible to account for the various people participating in making a TV show (cf. Gray, *Show* 85-115). Only when I specifically mention one individual do I clarify which position on the show's creative team he/she has exactly.

fourth wall breaking" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 157) and engaged in creating a close relationship with its fans, whose representation and influence on the show has "no precedent" on "television itself" (Sivarajan), *Supernatural* has, on the one hand, become a favorite of a small but passionate fanbase, and on the other, deserves a closer look with reference to the aims of my dissertation: It is this show, I argue, that particularly allows studying the efficacy of the fans' textual strategies in fanfiction—that allows studying the actual impact of the fans' claims for more agency and authority within the media industry, that allows an assessment of the influence and power of fannish activities on processes of cultural production, and that, in consequence, may also allow a glimpse into the future of a more participatory and democratic media landscape.

Launched in 2005 with little attention from its own network The WB/The CW,[158] critics, or the mass of viewers (cf., for example, Felschow; Hale), *Supernatural* was not automatically geared for success, let alone for "redefin[ing] TV success," as Ulaby puts it. Not very high from the start, its Nielsen ratings have remained consistently low over the course of its eleven seasons, with few episodes averaging even three million viewers,[159] so as to position it as nothing more than a small niche program in terms of viewers and popularity. Nevertheless, the show about "Sam and Dean Winchester, two brothers bound by tragedy and blood to the one thing that runs through both their veins—hunting monsters," as it is promoted on its official network website ("Main"), quickly turned into what scholars call a *cult show*, i.e. a show with a rather small fan following but whose fans predominantly engage in fannish activities such as fanfiction writing, are intensely involved with the program, and voice their opinions in a loud and assertive manner.[160] It is

[158] The WB merged in 2006 with UPN to form The CW.

[159] Episode 1x13 "Road 666" had an all-time high of 5.82 million viewers, with season one yielding the highest average in the number of viewers with 4.52 million; conversely, episode 10x21 "Dark Dynasty" had the lowest ratings of a mere 1.45 million viewers; in general, however, season seven had the worst success with the audience, which resulted in the all-time low of an average of 1.74 million viewers (all numbers taken from the entry "Ratings" on the *Supernatural Wiki*).

[160] Matt Hills was the first scholar to define *cult* for fan studies, explaining in 2000 that cult fandom can be differentiated from non-cult fandom due to its particularly "passionate, enduring, and socially organized fan audience," whose connection to their object of fandom is "primarily and significantly emotional" ("Media Fandom" 73). Although others have extended and slightly altered his concept, the idea behind the cult fan still centers on these fans' intense attachment to the respective object of fandom, their active production of fan-works, and a pronounced desire to make their voices heard. Moreover, however, *cult* is today largely associated with texts that have rather few fans and a comparatively small audience in general, hence *Supernatural* with its few viewers and its very vocal fanbase constitutes a prime example of a cult show. On cult fandom, in general, cf. for, example: Hills, "Media Fandom"; Abercrombie and

these fans that have prompted Mike Hale in a *New York Times* article to relate the show's longevity to its devoted fanbase who "take[s] a hand in the story." One of the major questions this chapter deals with accordingly is the process and the manner through which *Supernatural* has transformed itself from a regular cult show like the *X-Files* (USA; 1993-2002), *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (USA; 1997-2003), or *Lost* (USA; 2004-2010),[161] which have also "approach[ed] [their] fan base in ways that go beyond the product/consumer relationship" (Felschow; also cf. Schmidt), into a show that is so unique in their construction of the relation between the two parties so as to have had "no precedent" (Sivarajan) in the history of TV making and that needs to be, as I claim in the following, considered a forerunner in the ongoing democratization of the media landscape. Put in a different way, this chapter asks, first, what is so "unique" (Cohen qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196) about *Supernatural* in terms of its relationship with its fandom, and, secondly, if this exceptionality speaks for an unparalleled measure of fannish agency resulting from their online activities such as fanfiction writing so as to point towards future developments in the media industry which (may) increasingly grant to the fans participation and a share in the production of the meta-texts.

In order to give an adequate and cohesive portrayal of the show, its fans, and its representation of fannish activities, and, indeed, to be able to answer the question if *Supernatural*'s fans have power and a share in 'their' show—if *SPN* in fact "transplant[s] true blue fanfiction to the screen" (Mia Nina) instead of engaging in mere fan service for reasons of commercial and economic viability—, it is necessary to first provide a brief overview over the show's plot and its genesis over the years, its fandom, and the distinctive features that characterize the relationship between the program and its fans. In a second step, I situate the issue of increasing fannish agency and participation into the previous history of creator/audience relations, preparing the main part of the chapter that focuses on how *Supernatural* indeed seems to represent the next step in an ongoing development of the fans' empowerment: Here, a first subchapter (4.2) analyzes specific episodes such as 4x18 "The Monster at the End of This Book" or 5x09 "The Real Ghostbusters" that make *SPN* the "only show […] which has actually integrated it's own

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Longhurst 138-39; Ross 12-14; on *Supernatural* as a cult fandom, cf., for example: Felschow; Schmidt; Tosenberger, "Editorial"; Stein, "#Bowdown" 415.

[161] Although all three shows eventually became global successes and had huge audiences and fan followings in later seasons, each started out with a small and active fanbase and thus continues to be classified as a cult show in fan studies.

fanbase into its universe" (CordeliaGray), reading them as a realization of fannish agency in the actual production process; a second subchapter (4.3) then studies the interaction of *Supernatural*'s creative team with the show's fanbase, focusing on the fact that the dialogic nature of their communication turns their contact into an "actual relationship" (Schmidt) instead of constituting a mere question-and-answer sequence. Together, these two aspects provide the basis for a third and conclusive subchapter (4.4) that attempts to make sense of the question of whether this dialogue and the representation of fans, fanfiction, and fandom on screen truly allow seeing *SPN* and its fans as indicative of a new democratic balance of power in the media landscape.

As promoted on its official website, *Supernatural* has from its start in the fall season of 2005 centered on the two brothers Dean and Sam Winchester, whose family history has "bound" them "by tragedy and blood" to "hunting monsters" ("Main"): Born into a bloodline of hunters of the supernatural, the siblings played by Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki have been condemned to live the life of outsiders ever since the demon Azazel killed their mother when Dean was four years and Sam just six months old and their father John decided in consequence to give up their All-American, white picket fence lifestyle to raise his sons as hunters and seek revenge on monsters of all kinds. Set in the contemporary United States, the show thus follows the now grown-up brothers on their different quests to kill demons, prevent the Apocalypse, or close the Gates of Hell, alternating between episodes that develop the story arcs of the respective season and so-called 'monster of the week'-episodes that remain rather isolated from the frame mythology. Their world is populated by demons, vampires, werewolves, angels, ghouls, wendigoes, and witches, to just name a few, and is overshadowed by a long-raging war between Heaven and Hell which the two brothers are invariably drawn into in later seasons.

Happening at such an early point in both Dean's and Sam's life, John's resolve to raise his children as hunters of the supernatural and to travel with them all over the continental United States with no strings attached, moving every couple of weeks in pursuit of 'evil,' has had major repercussions on the characters and their lives: None of them has formed any lasting relations and friendships outside of their immediate family and they have for the most part little other meaningful human contact. With John finally giving up his life for that of his older son early in the show, Dean and Sam are essentially isolated from society apart from their fellow hunter Bobby Singer, an almost father-like

figure they visit from time to time, and a few other hunters that appear sporadically. This isolation is one of the dominating themes of *Supernatural*, with many of the episodes revolving around the fact that the two brothers are entirely codependent upon each other. Dean, in particular, cannot bear the thought of losing his younger sibling, while Sam has made several attempts to return to a more normative lifestyle and has even tried to completely break away from the family by going to college in Stanford. In the end, however, various events over the course of the seasons make him stay with Dean, recognizing that he needs his brother just like his brother needs him.

The isolation the two brothers have been subjected to all their lives only lessens somewhat after the angel Castiel, played by Misha Collins, rescues Dean from Hell in 4x01 "Lazarus Rising": Frequently contacting the brothers or aiding them in their quests, Castiel, or Cas, quickly becomes an important character and assumes a major role in the story arcs of later seasons. His introduction and subsequent integration into the storyline change the tone of the show, since afterwards it is no longer only Sam and Dean against the supernatural but lines begin to blur and progressively they realize they have to rely on others—human and non-human—to help them. As such, their social circle increases to now include Castiel and a few other characters such as the prophet Kevin Tran, played by Osric Chau, or Crowley, the King of Hell, played by Mark Sheppard, who enrich the show's fictional universe despite remaining recurring roles and who develop complicated and intense relationships with the two protagonists: As Richard Speight Jr., playing the part of the archangel Gabriel says, "This show isn't about killing demons. It's about relationship—an intricate, emotional framework upon which you can hang anything. I think that's the key and what attracts people to the story" (qtd. in Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 196). In the end, as *Supernatural*'s eleventh season currently demonstrates, the show may be as little popular with a general audience as it has always been but has come a long way in its plot, mythology, and character development to focus on the complex relationships humans, or for that matter angels, demons, and the King of Hell, are caught up in. Over the years, as Zubernis and Larsen therefore write in a review of 9x13 "The Purge," it is not really

> surprising […] just how real these characters have become to us. It's partly because we're so invested in them. And it's partly through familiarity, as we've welcomed them into our living rooms and onto our media screens for the past nine [or, by now, eleven] years. […] They've also become so real that I noticed that many of the episode reviews don't read like episode reviews at all. Instead, they read like a bunch of smart, articulate, passionate people who are

> heartbroken about the tragedies that have befallen people they love. Article after article tries to make sense of what was painful to everyone, the same way we would if we were staging an intervention for beloved family members. ("But Will")

The *Supernatural* fandom, as Zubernis and Larsen affirm here, has long been immensely "invested" in the show and its characters, even to the extent that the latter have almost become "beloved family members" because fans have been able to witness them grow and develop over more than a decade. Nevertheless, it needs to be expressly stressed that this intense emotional relationship fans of *SPN* have with what they affectionately term *Show*, i.e. capitalized and without an article, does not only reveal itself in "welcom[ing] [it] into our living rooms" in form of faithfully tuning in to watch new episodes of the meta-text every week but above all reveals itself in the activities of the online fandom, where the "tragedies" of the characters' lives and the fans' "love" for them translates to a virtually infinite number of transformative fan-works.

Despite being such a little-watched program, *Supernatural* has one of the most prolific and productive fandoms on the Internet, with more than 140,000 fan videos on *YouTube* as of late September 2015, and tens of thousands of fanfiction stories published by tens of thousands of fanauthors: Over 110,000 stories have been posted to *FanFiction.Net*, over 113,000 to the *Archive of Our Own*, and many thousands more are located at other platforms or archives such as *LiveJournal*, *Dreamwidth*, or *Tumblr*. In addition, the Big Bang challenge, the "biggest fanfiction event in Supernatural fandom" asks fanauthors each year to create novel-length stories with at least 20,000 words to be set either in the *SPN*/FPF universe or in RPF with Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki so that since the Big Bang's commencement in 2007, "over 1000 stories with artwork have been produced, totaling over 25 million words" and thousands of fans have been involved as "authors and artists, […] as betas and cheerleaders through the challenge, and of course as readers" ("SPN J2 Big Bang"). Fandom, as these examples show, has long embraced *Supernatural* as enthusiastically as few other meta-texts: The first *LiveJournal* site went online on 1 July 2005, i.e. more than two months before the first episode aired, the first fanfiction website followed in early September, and janedavitt posted the first ever *SPN* fanfiction mere hours after the show's debut[162]—not coincidentally her "Reunion" already

[162] For a brief history of the *Supernatural* fandom, cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 3; Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 77. For a more extensive history that detailedly lists all major events in the development of the online fan community, cf. the "Fandom Chronicles" 2005-2009 on the *Supernatural-Wiki* that chart, in particular, the beginnings of the fandom ("Fandom Chronicle: 2005").

featured "implied incest/slash" and was thus also the first example of what would later become known as *Wincest*. Although not yet instituted as a genre, Wincest was also the topic of the first *Supernatural* story on *FanFiction.Net*, which saw jace22's "Who Am I?," summarized as "SamDean slash incest," published on 22 September 2005, two days after 1x02 "Wendigo" aired.

As indicated already by these very first stirrings of the online fandom and its fanfiction, Wincest was soon to become a popular, if not the most popular, genre of *Supernatural* fanfiction writing. Although the pairing of Dean/Cas, or *Destiel*, has increasingly chipped away at the prevalence of Dean/Sam since Castiel's first appearance in season four, a large share of the stories created still centers on the sexual/romantic relationship between the two brothers. As it is, slash heavily dominates *SPN* fanfiction in general, either as Wincest or as *Destiel*, with only few examples of other slash pairings to be found online. Moreover, there is little of what fanauthors call *het*, i.e. stories that focus on a romantic/sexual relationship between a heterosexual couple, making it an almost negligible genre in the fandom which has never attracted many writers. In contrast, considerably more fans engage in creating *gen* stories that do not focus on any type of sexual/romantic relationship and rather deal with the Winchesters having to investigate monster cases or, in *SPN* parlance, "freak accidents" (e.g. 1x09; 2x11), their relationship to their father, their past on the road, or any other topic imaginable. While these comprise about a third of the total number of stories, according to missyjack ("What we write"),[163] they are nevertheless far less prominent than the slash fanfiction, although the later has always found itself situated in the quagmire of having to justify why the two brothers would break the societal taboo of incest.[164]

Although possibly surprising to non-fans—and by all means subject to some debate among fans—, the fact that Wincest, i.e. an incestuous and as such rather taboo relationship, has become particularly prevalent in the *SPN* fandom actually needs to be

[163] On her *LiveJournal* page, missyjack has created an "overview of [*SPN*] fanfic, the dominant genres and pairings, and some thoughts on how and why it is what it is" ("What we write"). Based on a database consisting of 35,000 stories posted until August of 2009, she gives detailed information as to the relation of RPF and FPF and the share of slash, *gen*, and *het* stories, estimating that in 2007 "over 90% of slash was Wincest." Although she identifies a considerable decrease of Wincest by 2009, she nevertheless claims that "the growing popularity of Dean/Castiel has been additive rather than substitutive."

[164] This quagmire of Wincest may also be one of the reasons why RPF fiction is so particularly popular with *SPN*, since RPF enables fans to slash Ackles and Padalecki ('Dean' and 'Sam') without having to write about an incestuous relationship. In fandom, the show has thus also come to be called "*Supernatural*—where RPS is the moral high ground" (cf. Flegel and Roth; "Real Person Fiction").

considered not very extraordinary or remarkable at all: With slash a widespread topic of fanfiction in general and fans very adept at explaining the incest in various subgenres of Wincest, studying the show itself makes it even more so a hardly unexpected phenomenon since the meta-text is replete with

> the typical ingredients a slasher needs: two extremely hot guys, a dead girlfriend, and a brotherly love that leaves no room for anyone else. Add a bit of spice like daddy issues, betrayal, childhood trauma and emotional dependency and you have your perfect dish to satisfy hordes of Slash fans. ("Wincest")

Recognizing what "perfect dish" the show provides for its fanauthors, even Sera Gamble, one of its executive producers, called *Supernatural* "the epic love story of Sam and Dean" already in its first season (qtd. in Borsellino), conceding the presence of strong and passionate emotions between the two brothers that fans would transform into fanfiction that focuses heavily on their more forceful manifestation in form of an actual romantic/sexual relationship: "[W]ith a show based on intense emotional relationships," writes missyjack conclusively, "there is often very little difference between Gen fic and slash. Hell there is often little difference between the Show and slash!" ("What we write").

Frequently, the meta-text gives proof of this "little difference," and this similarity "between the Show and slash"—between the meta-text and fanfiction—also constitutes one of the things that sets *Supernatural* apart from other TV shows or other meta-texts in general: Besides pure storytelling mechanics that need a close relationship between Sam and Dean for the show to make sense, *SPN* also explicitly recognizes the *fannish* transformation of the meta-text into slash in instances that demonstrate that the producers are very much aware of the fanauthors' online activities. As such, the "epic love story of Sam and Dean" is not only implied by the solitary existence the two brothers lead but is also directly addressed in the script, like when in 5x18 "Point of No Return" the angel Zachariah concludes that "Sam and Dean Winchester are psychotically, irrationally, erotically codependent on each other." Far from only referring to Wincest in a few and isolated script lines, however, *Supernatural* markedly distinguishes itself by overtly inserting this fannish genre into its episodes, even extending their appropriation of Wincest to actually representing the activity of fanfiction writing itself: In addition to many episodes that reference Wincest by having the boys mistaken for a gay couple (cf., for example, 1x08; 1x18; 2x11; 4x11; 5x16; 7x05), several of them thus overtly feature the show's slash fans (4x18; 5x01; 5x09; 7x08) and 5x01 even presents a fan caught up in the process of writing Wincest fanfiction. To an unparalleled extent are "[f]an practices

[…] incorporated into the show itself and canon and 'fanon' live side by side" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 3).

Nevertheless, *SPN* does not at all stop at these open and direct representations of fannish activities, remarkable as they may be, but intensifies what Kim Rhodes, who plays the character of Sheriff Mills, characterizes as a "really great symbiotic relationship and communal creation of a show" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 197) in numerous other instances. In what becomes possible due to its nature as a serial production as opposed to a 'finished' text, the meta-text acknowledges fans and fanfiction rather continuously, breaking the fourth wall between text and audience "into such tiny pieces it's doubtful that reconstruction is an option" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 171; also cf. Wilkinson): As such, it features, for instance, fan conventions (5x09) or *LARPers* and *LARPing* (Live Action Role Players/-ing; 5x09; 8x11); moreover, episodes are set up as Mary Sues about the producers (4x18; 5x01; 5x09; 5x22), as RPFs about the actors (6x15), and as transformative (fan)fiction about other meta-texts (2x18; 5x08; 9x04). As fans in turn write fanfiction about these episodes, *Supernatural* thus constitutes a "box of mirrors" (Wilkinson) that is highly revolutionary in that it gives an unprecedented measure of representation and agency to the fans and their practices: In *SPN*'s (democratic) involvement of its fanbase, fandom and fanfiction become visible in the meta-text, they participate in its production, and finally acquire a share of ownership.

While I discuss these meta-textual instances of fannish power to more detail in the next subchapter, *Supernatural* does not only engage with its fandom on the level of its episodes or by bringing fanfiction to the screen but also shows its special status as what I term a participatory show in its own 'paratext,' i.e. in interviews of the producers that recognize fannish influence on the plot, in conventions that have fans come together with cast and crew, or in *Twitter* chats that virtually remove the difference between creators and fans.[165] The focus of the third subchapter, these non-meta-textual conversations are part of the dialogue I postulate fans and producers to engage in, with the two parties constantly responding to each other through various media spaces that give them more immediate

[165] *Twitter* in particular has been recognized as a medium that removes differences in status between individual participants. Louisa Stein, for instance, elaborates on how on *Twitter* both author and fans "share the same basic digital framework and limitations; celebrity and non-celebrity tweets appear side by side, and all are alike limited to one hundred and forty characters, no matter how famous the author"; moreover, she points out that *Twitter* repositions everyone as producers since all tweeters are "authors of their own Twitter feeds and branded selves" ("#Bowdown" 411).

access to each other than ever before: *Supernatural*'s fan conventions, as Larsen and Zubernis describe in their books on the *SPN* fandom[166] are characterized by a "carnival atmosphere" that creates a "less mediated, more intimate" space (*Fandom* 21), offering fans the chance to personally meet and question both actors and producers in panel discussions and to interact with them in organized meet & greets or in spontaneous karaoke sessions at the hotel bar (*Fangasm* 192).[167] Several times a year, as, for instance, the *Supernatural-Wiki*'s "Convention Calendar" yields, these events thus physically remove the barriers—the fourth wall, so to speak—that separate fans from their object of fandom, repeating what the show achieves with its representation of fan-works in its episodes.

Repeatedly, cast and crew have expressed appreciation for being able to meet fans face to face, acknowledging the shared social space and sense of intimacy conventions create between everyone involved—despite, or precisely because of, often hundreds of fans attending. So admires actor Matt Cohen that there are "not many other shows where all the fans come, they meet each other and become buddies and they're hanging out, and the actors are talking and hanging out, we're singing together" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196). Again recognizing that *SPN* is different from "other shows," Cohen stresses the communal atmosphere that does not only pervade conventions but dominates the relationship between fans and producers in general, going so far as to position the character he plays "as a joint construction of his own acting skills and the desires of his fans to see what they want to see" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 185). Moreover, conventions are also a significant place where the creative team demonstrates its awareness of the online fandom and its fanfiction writing: At the EyeCon convention in Orlando, FL, in April 2008, actor Jim Beaver, for instance, sported a T-shirt that

[166] *Fandom at the Crossroads* and *Fangasm* are the scholarly and fannish accounts, respectively, of Zubernis and Larsen's immersion and research of the *SPN* fandom, presenting inter alia how they have managed to become, as Kripke has styled them, "the official reporters of the fandom" (qtd. in *Fangasm* 228; 185-239). This status enables them, unlike any other work on *Supernatural*, to incorporate many voices from cast and crew alike into their books and their online blog *Fangasm! When Academics Go to Hollywood*.

[167] For an extensive account of conventions in general and *SPN* conventions in particular, cf., for example, Zubernis and Larsen's two books: While *Fangasm* focuses much more on the atmosphere that pervades conventions, highlighting the fans' enthusiasm, the excitement they experience during the convention days, and the pervasive feeling of "fun" (234) people have who "fly three thousand miles across the country to go to a fan convention" (ix), *Fandom* seeks to establish conventions as "a middle ground" (22) for both fans and producers: Recognizing them as a space that affords an "intimate relationship" and "close proximity" (21), the two scholars also acknowledge that the organizational structure of the conventions (bodyguards for the actors, different routes for fans and cast to interview spaces, etc.) serves to a certain degree as a "gatekeeper and boundary enforcer" (22).

proclaimed "I read John/Bobby," instantly revealing not only his awareness but also his appreciation of the slash fanfiction that involves his character Bobby and the Winchesters' father John. Clearly, Beaver shows to be familiar with the genre and the conventions of fanfiction writing, demonstrating that he has become a true 'fan,' i.e. that he has read *J/B* stories and has devoted the time and effort mentioned in the previous chapter as necessary to cross the threshold of acquiring fanspeak. As he expected (cf. Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 126), fannish reaction to his appearance was enthusiastic—as leighm writes, "Best thing ever"—since to them it once again confirmed *SPN*'s exceptionally close proximity to fandom.

Fanfiction has apparently become one of the major focal points for the producers to establish and maintain a more intimate relationship with their fans: Many of them admit to knowing about and reading fanfiction, with Gamble even acknowledging to have written fanfiction about another show and Collins playing with the idea of "writing a story of my own about Dean" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 222). Nonetheless, none of them have gone as far as Chau, who on 6 November 2013 tweeted a story he had written about Dean as a dog, (un)aware of the fact that *dog!dean* represents one of fandom's tropes, even if one of the more outlandish. Other than Chau's fannish activities, *Twitter* has also generally become one of the most popular portals for fans and producers to engage with each other. Bringing an "amazing energy to Season 9," actors Padalecki, Chau, or Sheppard, for instance, and creators Guy Norman Bee, Adam Glass, Robbie Thompson, and many others have recently "join[ed] fandom on Twitter to live tweet the episodes," which has Zubernis and Larsen conclude that here the "reciprocal relationship between fans and producers […] [is] very much in evidence, with many of the actors watching 'as fans' alongside the rest of us" ("*Supernatural* 9x02"): While the show is airing each week, a number of members of the creative team thus comes together on *Twitter* to give insight into the production of the respective episode, share behind-the-scenes stories, or congratulate each other on an scene well done. Available for discussions with fans who tweet them in return, they first decrease the distance to the fans—especially via the medium of *Twitter*, as mentioned above—and accord them a closer share in the production process, while, in a second step, they quasi become fans themselves, as when they voice their appreciation for an actor's character interpretation, the lighting of a specific scene, or the creativity of the art department.

Whereas Padalecki's and Collins's *Twitter* accounts[168] are particularly indicative of the way the producers create a shared social space with their fans, establishing a level of equality and intimacy rather unique in TV making, the specifically participatory aspect of the show foremost surfaces in the actual share fans have in its production. Far from considering fans as a mere passive audience, the creators of the meta-text frequently tap into fannish resources to produce the show, using the fanauthors' knowledge to be able to write themselves: Writer Robbie Thompson, for instance, tweeted the *Supernatural-Wiki* on 21 March 2013, "thank you so much and thanks for your amazing site which was so helpful to me working on this script back home in MI." Hashtagging his tweet with "#SPNFamily," he stresses not only the importance of the fans' input in the creation of 8x17 "Goodbye Stranger" but addresses once more the close, quasi familial relationship between everyone involved—writers and fanwriters alike. In the end, as the *Supernatural-Wiki* wrote on its *Tumblr* blog in response, "basically SPN fandom gets a credit on this [episode]!"—8x17 was produced with their participation and, what is more, the writers even officially acknowledged the fannish share in the production process.[169]

As it is, *Supernatural* seems to have committed to a particularly reciprocal and participatory relationship with its fans, making it different from other shows, whose serial nature would also allow them to integrate the latter into their production process. Frequently, as this overview of some of the instances, spaces, and media channels the creative team and fans use to engage with each other and to advance the degree of their interaction illustrates, the producers transcend the distance that previously defined the relationship between the two parties, voicing both their appreciation of the fanwriters' activities and fan-works and their willingness to dissolve the binary and hierarchies traditionally governing their relations. In reference to the central questions of this chapter, *SPN*'s participatory structure that relies on fannish agency and contribution may thus very

[168] While Padalecki engages more heavily in live tweeting and above described activities, Collins creates a specific *Twitter* persona that reflects the changing roles of fans and producers in today's media landscape. By satirically "heighten[ing] his role as public leader and (sexually) desired figure at the center of a predominantly female fan base," Stein writes in her analysis of Collins's tweets in her article "#Bowdown To Your New God," he "calls out structures of audience/celebrity relations" (413) in order to finally position himself as just as transgressive as fans in their fanfiction writing. The actor, to quote Stein once again, constructs himself as a "renegade transmedia author" (417), who, in the end, becomes one of his fans, a "joint-creator, participant, and inhabitant of millennial read/write culture" (408).

[169] Certainly, it needs to be acknowledged that this usage of fannish resources may conversely be considered an exploitation of fans and their labor since, due to the fannish gift economy as explained in the previous chapter, accessing any fannish site such as the *Supernatural-Wiki* does not cost anything and is free for any Internet user, be that a fan or, as in the case of Thompson, a producer.

likely make the show represent another step in the history of TV making, since other meta-texts of today rather tend to be dominated by what Ross has termed "invitational strategies" (8) instead of true participation: With the producers using these to draw audiences to participate in a TV show up to an exactly pre-defined extent only, none of the contemporary "overt," "organic," or "obscured" (Ross 8-9; 71-217) strategies discussed below can in the end lead to a genuine empowerment of the participating viewers as in *SPN* but only to a "*sense*" (72) of empowerment.

Nevertheless, even these strategies present a decisive strengthening of the audience to bring about the "tele-participation" (4) Ross identifies in contemporary TV making, since previously, to briefly embed both today's practices and *Supernatural*'s possibly exceptional position in a historical perspective,[170] the relation between the creators of the meta-text and the audience was in fact characterized by far greater distance and, what is more, active attempts on part of the producers to *suppress* the fannish efforts of decreasing it. While the media landscape before the late 1960s and early 1970s had generally built, as mentioned, on the idea of the passive audience who receives the text as "monolithic" and is largely a "prisoner of the text" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 18), the following decades saw this diametrical opposition between consumer and producer developing in two vastly different ways that have led to the conflicts between the two parties that characterize the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: On the one hand, this binary began to slowly dissolve in the process of fans becoming more active and attempting to attain greater visibility for their activities; on the other hand, it was becoming gradually more subject to the producers' endeavors to keep up this chasm and set it in stone.

As the decades of the 1970s to the mid- or late 1990s show, the creators of the meta-text increasingly considered the first attempts of fans to exert pressure or power on the media industry as threatening to their hegemonial position, responding to the challenge fannish expressions of the arising conviction of their own agency and their belief in being entitled to greater participation posed with attempts to stop or restrict the fans', and in particular the fanauthors', activities. Whereas fans used these years to develop an inkling of their power with the nowadays infamous "Save-*Star Trek*" letter campaign of the late

[170] For a more detailed account of the changing relations between audience and producers since the 1960s, cf., for example: Abercrombie and Longhurst 3-76; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 9-50; Gray and Johnson 1-134; Ross 1-34. On the specific activities of fans to exert their power and attempts of the producers to restrict this power, cf., for example: Jenkins and Tulloch, "Beyond" 9-12; Jenkins, "'Out'"; Menon 361-66; Murray 15-19; Ross 234-38; Clerc 13-40; Koulikov.

1960s that saved the show for a third season (cf., for example, Jenkins and Tulloch, "Beyond" 9; "History of Star Trek Fan Campaigns"), began to organize themselves in larger communities, and were, generally speaking, becoming producers themselves with their fan-works, the creators of the meta-text reacted largely negatively to the rising power and visibility of fandom: Sending out, for instance, cease-and-desist letters, they frequently threatened legal consequences if the fans did not stop writing and publishing fanfiction, creating fan art, or simply using copyrighted material in any form. As only few of these measures, however, were actually successful in forcing fans to refrain from publishing fanzines or, later, to close websites with their videos or stories (cf., for example, "Cease & Desist"), fannish productivity even grew in response to recognizing their virtual 'invulnerability.' Supported by the simultaneously accelerating digital revolution, fanfiction and other fan-works soon became almost ubiquitous on the new medium of the Internet so that ever since the early 2000s, the producers have had to realize little by little that neither cease-and-desist letters nor efforts to limit fannish activity to certain accepted frames (such as, boldly put, no 'porn' in *Harry Potter* fanfiction) have resulted in their desired goal to protect their intellectual property from being used by fans.

Instead, in the first years of the twenty-first century the omnipresence of fans and their increasingly global communities began to harm individual companies which, as Warner Bros. in a 2001 case involving *Harry Potter* fanfiction, had "failed to anticipate the resulting international wave of negative publicity" (Murray 15). Ultimately, the early to mid-2000s therefore saw the initial stages of a major turn in the producers' approach to dealing with fans and their activities: Rather than attempting to suppress fandom, they started to actively court it in form of the "invitational strategies" (8) Ross discusses in her work *Beyond the Box* of 2008. Having recognized the commercial viability of fans—the fact that fans will buy every book and DVD, purchase any kind of merchandise article, and tune in for each episode—, "sectors of the television industry," Ross writes, began "to listen to them [….] in the hopes of translating fans' circulation of cultural capital into economic capital" (75). In the end, however, her analysis of several shows such as *American Idol* (USA; 2002-), *The O.C.* (USA; 2003-2007) and *Lost* (USA; 2004-2010) makes clear that the previously open display of the producers' power has today merely yielded to a more disguised attempt of enforcing it by means of channeling fannish activity into accepted bounds: Via encouraging viewers to vote for their favorites to

tangibly influence the course of the show ("overt" strategies in *American Idol*), via using cross-platforming to direct viewers to network-owned websites ("organic" strategies in *The O.C.*), or via creating a certain kind of "narrative messiness" (176) that makes fans engage more heavily with the text through "puzzle-solving," "prediction and speculation" (9; "obscured" strategies in *Lost*), the creators of the three programs thus generated an "aura of authentic participation" (89)—or pseudo-participation—that has them, in the end, retain power over the text and control the fanbase despite seemingly fulfilling the fannish claims for a greater share in the production process.

As such, Ross's study shows that producers have lately begun to listen to *parts* of what Bud Caddell writes in his exhortation to them on his *Mad Men* fan website: "We're your biggest fans, your die-hard proponents, and when your show gets cancelled we'll be the first to pass around the petition. Talk to us. Befriend us. Engage us. But please, don't treat us like criminals" (also cf. Jenkins, Ford, and Green 33). So have in the recent years of pseudo-participation the creators of the meta-text largely stopped taking legal steps against fans; moreover, they have started to "[e]ngage" them through forms of guided and pre-defined participation. Some have even started to "[t]alk" to them, as Ross mentions in regard to programs like *Xena* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* that have either acknowledged fans in their meta-texts (39-43) or whose producers have sought out some official spaces like the shows' network chat rooms (41), where they, as she concludes however, "'drop in' […], offer information and insight, and then leave rather than stay for anything more intimate and in-depth" (251). Despite developments to reduce the distance between the fanbase and the producers, there has accordingly been up to now little evidence of TV shows and their producers really attempting to "[b]efriend" the fans, since scholars have convincingly established that producers tend to "[e]ngage" and "[t]alk" to the fans mostly because they "see cult communities online as opportunities to ensure built-in audiences with purchase power" (Felschow; also cf. Booth 71-73; Ross 218-64).

The question this chapter now seeks to answer is whether *Supernatural* transcends both the previous and the contemporary constellation of fan-producer relations, i.e. whether in the case of *Supernatural*, as Laura E. Felschow puts it in reference to Ross, "an invitation to participate was offered *after* cult fans had already invited *themselves*" (my emphasis)—or rather, as I see it, whether *Supernatural* does not at all rely on "invitational strategies" but instead repositions producers and fans as 'co-hosts' that together participate in its production. Embedded in the framework of contemporary tele-participation, which is

shaped by the producers' strategies alongside the increasing demands of viewers that daily experience their capability to become "micro-producers" (Hartley 39) on their *Facebook* profiles, *Twitter* accounts, or personal blogs, *SPN*, as I argue in the following, goes one step further than other shows: Although I cannot conclusively foreclose that the fanbase's purchasing power may be the main incentive, this study is geared towards showing that *Supernatural*'s creators "[t]alk" to their fans, "[e]ngage" them, and, most importantly "[b]efriend" them—in short, my subsequent subchapters intend to demonstrate through studying both the meta-text and the extra-meta-textual interaction of fans and producers that *Supernatural*'s fans have in fact gained an unprecedented measure of power, that they can "exert control over the producer and the text without being expressly invited or permitted to do so" (Felschow), and that *Supernatural* may thus be considered a new form of TV making that is indicative of a powerful revolution within the media landscape in which course today's media industry gradually democratizes through fannish agency and participation.

Selecting different episodes from a broad range of seasons, I first examine the representation of fans and—in particular—their fanfiction in the meta-text, studying in which ways they are portrayed and what can be inferred from the fact that not only fanauthors appear in the meta-text but also *SPN*'s producers. Moreover, I point out how genres and topics of fanfiction feature in the episodes, looking, for example, at the integration of Wincest, Mary Sue, and RPF in the show's storylines to illustrate the creative team's keen awareness and intimate engagement with the fans' *works*. Although this subchapter also discusses other representations of fannish topics, preferences, and activities in *SPN*'s meta-text in order to present a comprehensive picture of the fanauthors' presence within the episodes, this part focuses above all on the agency fans have acquired through their transformative fiction. Emphasizing the extent to which fanfiction is integrated in the meta-text allows my thesis, first, to add a decidedly different angle to previous research on *Supernatural*, which has as of yet largely omitted addressing the show's fanfiction even in the (few) articles that center on its fandom and fans and which has then neglected to draw fully informed conclusions in regard to fannish power due to its very much restricted scope of analysis.[171] In a second—and by far more important—

[171] Apart from Zubernis and Larsen's books on *SPN* and its fandom that both focus on the emotions fans experience in their immersion into fandom (*Fandom* 7; *Fangasm* xi-xiii), *Supernatural* has as of yet drawn only little academic attention compared to other shows such as *The X-Files*, *Buffy The Vampire*

step, concentrating on fanfiction in the show directly links this case study to my previous chapters that argue for the impact the fans' resignification of the meta-text into an archive and their textual strategies have in expressing their power and revolutionizing the media landscape along more democratic principles.

In a subsequent subchapter, I then study the paratextual communication between producers and fans, focusing on the online—and sometimes, offline—dialogue they engage in to negotiate various issues in the meta-text or, on part of the producers, to demonstrate their awareness of fandom and its activities. Here, I look, for instance, at interviews, convention statements, and fannish reactions to both meta-text and paratext, intending to present the exchange between the two parties not as consisting of, like Ross has it, a rather powerless fan and an "auteur […] who might *at most* 'drop in' to a fan site" (251) but as an actual dialogue that relies on empowered fans and producers who are willing to listen—who are willing to acknowledge the fanauthors' power since, as quoted in the beginning, they are "truly partnered with the fans of the show" (McG qtd. in Bekakos) and "are just as into us as we are into them" (Eden Winchester). Ultimately, as I show in my concluding subchapter, *Supernatural* is thus likely to present a look into the possible, more democratic future of TV making—notwithstanding any commercial

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Slayer, or *Lost*. Nevertheless, the two books and the 2010 special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* on *SPN* have removed it from the vast uncharted territories of fan studies and media studies.

Altogether, my research has yielded articles that discuss Wincest (cf. Tosenberger, "'epic'"), the fannish trope of male pregnancy in the show's fanfiction (cf. Åström), the difference in *SPN* RPF and FPF (cf. Flegel and Roth), the protagonists' car and its function as a "Negotiator of Melodrama and Masculinity" (cf. Bruce), or the roles religion, folklore, fairy tales, and their transformations have in the meta-text (cf. Petersen; Tosenberger, "'Kinda'").

Fandom and its representations in the show have been mentioned in articles by Felschow; Sivarajan; Fathalla; M. Gray; Schmidt; and Wilkinson—all of which concentrate on episode 4x18 and two others that address *SPN*'s fans. Even though their focus and agenda are in each case rather different from mine, their greatest drawback is one of scope and comprehensiveness: None of them goes beyond a partial analysis of the episodes, i.e. they either discuss just one episode of the show's eleven seasons (cf. Felschow; Sivarajan for a reading of 4x18) or one issue (cf. Fathalla, who analyzes the fannish response to the character of the fan Becky; cf. M. Gray, who looks at fan characters in 4x18, 5x01, and 5x09; cf. Schmidt, who discusses the, albeit few, negative reactions to 4x18 in the context of "melodramatic identification"; cf. Wilkinson, who analyzes the breaking of the fourth wall in 4x18 and 5x01). Even Zubernis and Larsen's more comprehensive *Fandom at the Crossroads* devotes only a brief 15 pages to four episodes (159-74), attempting hardly more than a summary of their content in the context of studying "fan shame," i.e. the idea that some parts of fandom have felt 'outed' by *Supernatural*'s representation of fannish practices since they have "internalized a significant degree of shame about being a fan" (57).

While some of the ideas these scholars propose have been helpful to my own study, my analysis is first meant to be vastly more comprehensive as it covers episodes fram various seasons and discusses several different examples and functions of the fans' transformative works in the meta-text and, secondly, it also has a decidedly different focus, i.e. fannish agency and, in consequence, the fanauthors' participation in processes of production.

interests the show does in fact “transplant true blue fanfiction to the screen” (Mia Nina) and thus accepts the fanwriters’ participation and agency in demonstrating that the “writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved on some level in collectively creating the world of the show” (CordeliaGray).

4.2 The "only show to integrate its own fanbase into its universe": The Representation of Fanfiction in the Meta-Text of *Supernatural*

> "MAN BEHIND COUNTER: You're fans. […] You're asking questions like the building's haunted. Like those guys from the books. What are they called? Uh... 'Supernatural.' Two guys, use fake IDs with rock aliases, hunt down ghosts, demons, vampires. What are their names? […]
> SAM: Sam and Dean? […]
> DEAN: You're saying this is a book?
> MAN BEHIND COUNTER: Books. It was a series. Didn't sell a lot of copies, though. Kind of had more of an underground cult following.
> […]
> DEAN is reclining on the bed, flipping through a book and frowning. SAM is sitting at a table with his laptop, doing some online research.
> DEAN: This is freakin' insane. How's this guy know all this stuff? Everything is in here. I mean everything. From the racist truck to—to me having sex. I'm full-frontal in here, dude. […] How come we haven't heard of them before?
> SAM: They're pretty obscure. I mean, almost zero circulation. Uh, started in '05. The publisher put out a couple dozen before going bankrupt. […]
> DEAN: I reiterate. Freaking insane (he browses a website). Check it out. There's actually fans. There's not many of them, but still. Did you read this? […] Although for fans, they sure do complain a lot. Listen to this—simpatico says 'the demon story line is trite, clichéd, and overall craptastic.' Yeah, well, screw you, simpatico. We lived it.
> SAM: Yeah. Well, keep on reading. It gets better.
> DEAN: There are 'Sam girls' and 'Dean girls' and—what's a 'slash fan'?
> SAM: As in... Sam-slash-Dean. Together.
> DEAN: Like, together together?
> SAM: Yeah.
> DEAN: They do know we're brothers, right?
> SAM: Doesn't seem to matter.
> DEAN: Oh, come on. That... That's just sick."
>
> 4x18 "The Monster at the End of This Book."[172]

This scene that is set in the opening minutes of 4x18 "The Monster at the End of This Book" was on 2 April 2009 the prelude to numerous direct references to fans and, especially, their activities as "slash fan[s]" and fanauthors in the episodes and seasons to come. Introducing the *Supernatural* book series, which in similarity to the program itself has an "underground cult following" with "almost zero circulation," the show transposed their hitherto implicit allusions to the online fandom and their writing of Wincest fanfiction into an overt acknowledgment of its fans and fanauthors, establishing them as a

[172] For most episodes, scripts are available at the *Supernatural-Wiki*. For this dissertation, however, I created my own transcripts, which I merely counter-checked with those online for accuracy.

presence in the meta-text itself. With time, the "slash fan" generically referred to in 4x18 would—with the introduction of Becky Rosen in 5x01—even become a proper character that appeared in different episodes over the seasons and would even write Wincest fanfiction on screen (5x01) or marry Sam in an albeit short-lived fannish dream come true (7x08). What is more, the books' "number one fan" (5x01) Becky embodies just one of several different representations of fans on the show, with *Supernatural* using the plotline of the book series that both re-tells and prophesies the lives of Sam and Dean to introduce Sera Siege, who is both the books' publisher and an avid fan (4x18), and the fanboys Demian and Barnes, who the Winchesters meet at a *Supernatural* fan convention (5x09). In later seasons, fans and their activities find another representation in the recurring character of Charlie Bradbury, who is a fangirl in every sense of the word: She collects *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* figurines, attends conventions, knows virtually everything about pop culture, and acts as the queen of the *LARP*ing game of "Moondoor."

Apart from these overt representations of the show's fandom and their activities, however, the producers' engagement with fanfiction goes several steps further: Not only does Becky write Wincest while the viewers are watching but the scripts of several episodes seemingly follow popular fanfiction genres and include fannish tropes. So has 6x15 "The French Mistake" Dean and Sam being sent to an alternate reality where they find themselves on the set of a TV show called *Supernatural*, where various members of cast and crew mistake them to be the actors Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki, making them slip into their own actors' role in a classic example of RPF fiction. With members of the creative team Eric Kripke, Sera Gamble, or Bob Singer, to just name a few, also appearing in 6x15, the producers moreover set up the episode as a piece of Mary Sue fanfiction, creating another self-insert episode which continues what has also begun in 4x18 with the introduction of the writer of the *Supernatural* book series Chuck Shurley, who functions as an avatar for the show's creator and executive producer Kripke himself (cf. "Chuck Shurley"; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 160). Prominently featuring in different episodes and serving as the structural models of others, the fanfiction genres of RPF and Mary Sue therefore exemplify that the "creators of the canon are not only acknowledging and communicating with [...] fans, but in a similar *way*" (Sivarajan): The showrunners transform both *Supernatural* itself and, as episodes such as 7x06 and 9x04 show, other meta-texts according to the rules and conventions of fanfiction, showing their awareness, their familiarity, and also their appreciation of fannish productivity.

Ultimately, numerous instances to be discussed in this chapter therefore establish *Supernatural* as in fact "transplant[ing] true blue fanfiction to the screen" (Mia Nina) and as the "only show to integrate its own fanbase into its universe" (CordeliaGray).[173]

Evidence of the attention the producers extend to their fanbase fanauthors could already detect in 1x08 "Bugs," in which the two brothers are twice mistaken for a gay couple when the developers of a new neighborhood tell them that they "accept homeowners of any race, religion, color, or... sexual orientation." Immediately recognizing this statement and Dean's answering smack on Sam's behind as what fans call a *shout out*, i.e. a (subtle) reference of the creators to their fans and their activities within the meta-text, fanwriters were deeply appreciative of the producers' acknowledgment of their presence and their apparent familiarity with Wincest, since "they really do all but spell it out for us" (whylime1024; also cf. kaylaw; OHVibe). Until 4x18 would then actually "spell it out," at least seven more episodes contained *shout outs* in regard to Wincest, demonstrating in their different forms that the showrunners were indeed already in the show's early seasons intimately aware of the genre and did not only generally fall into line with contemporary attempts of the media industry to "capitaliz[e] on fans' fascination with slash, gay subtext, and so-called 'bromance', both in corporate advertisements and in interviews" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 151).

While Wincest would continue to appear in implicit references up until the current eleventh season, so that—not counting later references to other slash genres such as *Destiel*—up to now at least 18 episodes out of altogether about 200 have alluded to the brothers having an incestuous relationship, 4x18 and future episodes in a similar vein utterly "demolished" (Wilkinson) the fourth wall, introducing fans, fanfiction, Wincest, authors, producers, and even the "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146) to the *Supernatural* universe. Without being able to detailedly analyze all episodes in question,[174] I

[173] While Ross detects possible representations of fans in *Xena* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (39-43), who may be read as allusions to the respective show's fandom, *Supernatural* nevertheless remains the "only" show to, first, have overt fan characters whose object of fandom is the show (in the form of its books) itself and who explicitly engage in fannish activities such as fanfiction writing, and, secondly, to use these fan characters to *truly* "integrate its own fanbase" as a vital element of its storytelling.

[174] Fan characters appear directly in thirteen episodes and are mentioned at least two more; Chuck as a representative of the producers appears directly in seven episodes and is mentioned in two more. Moreover, in each of the episodes that show them on screen, both the fans and Chuck play a "role vital to the plot," which I read in accordance to Melissa Gray as a "nod to the importance of fandom to *Supernatural*"—or, rather, as confirmation of their agency in storytelling and production processes. While the episodes I selected for analysis are highly representative of *SPN*'s integration of fans and fannish activities, a fully

accordingly argue that at the latest from 4x18 onwards the fans have in *SPN* been getting the space and participation they have long demanded in both this and other meta-texts, reading the fact that, notwithstanding any commercial interests in part of the producers, the fanauthors' transformative works have been shaping the meta-text as validation of the efficacy of their strategies—as an affirmation of their power and their agency that even the presence of the producers in the meta-text and in particular the character of Chuck/'Kripke'/God/Prophet of the Lord cannot disrupt but instead supports.

Chuck Shurley, played by Rob Benedict, first appears in the *Supernatural* universe in the middle of episode 4x18, with Sam and Dean getting to know him as the author of the book series *Supernatural* that has "[e]verything" about the previous life of the two brothers, from, as Dean puts it, "the racist truck to—to me having sex."[175] As the books have more of an "underground cult following," the Winchesters have not been aware of them before, but after having been introduced to them by a salesman who they interrogate for a hunt of theirs—coincidentally, he first mistakes them for "fans" of the novels and then takes the volumes out of his "Bargain Bin"—, they quickly realize that "[t]here's actually fans," albeit "not many of them, but still." Horrified by the fact that the books follow their lives as faithfully and detailedly as possible, they resolve to find its author and thus contact the series' publisher Sera Siege, only to discover that she is an avid fan of the books who is only willing to divulge any information after the brothers self-identify as "big fans" who have read the novels "[c]over to cover." They bond over their 'common' fannishness and she points them towards Chuck, who first also believes them to be fans of his who have come to get him in a kind of "*Misery* thing" à la Stephen King. In the end, however, they can convince him that they are truly the "Dean and Sam [he has] been writing about," which makes him conclude that there can be "only one explanation": "Obviously, I'm a god. […] I write things and then they come to life. Yeah, no, I'm definitely a god. A cruel, cruel, capricious god." As the remainder of the episode continues to play with the fact that *Supernatural*, the books, closely mirror *Supernatural*, the TV series, the former's author is ultimately revealed to be a "Prophet of the Lord," with the angel Castiel declaring it impossible for Sam and Dean to escape from their

comprehensive study of every detail of these episodes in addition to a study of the other episodes I do not focus on would probably engender a dissertation of its own.

[175] To facilitate reading in this chapter, I do not give the episode number for each quote taken from an episode as I discuss episodes consecutively: Each quote without a number thus stems from the episode analyzed in the respective subpart of the chapter; only if quotes are taken from a different episode—or if the context may be misleading—do I specifically identify them by giving the episode number in brackets.

fictional and foretold lives in the novels: "What the prophet has written," he announces, "can't be unwritten. As he has seen it, so it shall come to pass." Finally, the episode ends with Chuck being told to do "[w]hat you always do," i.e. to "[w]rite," which becomes the prelude for several more appearances of both himself and the *Supernatural* books in the further course of the show.

Fans, their activities, and the figure of the writer as an "Author-God" loom large in this episode that demonstrates on part of the producers a great deal of awareness of both the online fandom and of their own conflicted position within the binary of creator/audience. *Shout outs* to fans are strewn throughout the entire episode, with them far too numerous to analyze each and every one of them in the frame of this chapter. So has the character of Sera Siege, for example, the brothers identify themselves by engaging in some sort of trivia game that makes them answer questions about the books that only a truly devoted fan, who has memorized "Sam's score on the LSAT" or "Dean's favorite song," would know—or, for that matter, the 'real' Sam and Dean. Moreover, Siege makes them show their demonic protection tattoos, only to reveal in turn that she, as a fan of the books, has the same one, albeit in a more delicate spot—a scene which picks up on the fact that not only many fans of the show indeed sport matching tattoos but also that executive producer Sera Gamble, when first interviewed about them, announced that she would only be "convinced we're truly a cult hit when a fan gets the same tattoo" (also cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 159).

In addition to highlighting the quasi encyclopedic knowledge and the devotion fans of the show have, the producers, however, also go much further than that, introducing another level on which to comment on their own fans and their activities by the fact that *Supernatural* is not only a book series on their show but that there are "actually fans" who respond to this fictional meta-text just like the fans of the show respond to the real meta-text. In this way, Dean does not only discover the novels' fans in general but makes astute observations about their online fandom that are directly drawn from the show's fandom: Fanauthors, Dean ascertains quickly on perusing some websites, are split into "Sam girls" and "Dean girls," with each faction favoring one of the two brothers. Moreover, he also discovers one of the most popular fannish practices, i.e. to "complain a lot" about the meta-text: In reference to the books, he thus reads out a fan's comment, telling Sam that, "simpatico says 'the demon story line is trite, clichéd, and overall craptastic.'" While fanauthors indeed "complain a lot" about the meta-text and write their fanfiction to make

it less "craptastic," the whole issue becomes even more revealing about the producers' engagement with fandom due to the fact that simpatico is an actual fan who frequently posts at the *SPN* forums on the website *Television without Pity*—and who actually responded there to her being mentioned on the show two days after the episode aired, writing that she was "shocked and bemused that they picked me of all people […] Apparently posts I made years ago have left permanent scars on their psyches."

Reasoning that her fannish opinion has left "permanent scars" on the producers' "psyches," simpatico reveals her conviction that on this show fans and their activities can truly influence the creators of the meta-text—and, at that, not only on a personal level but also, as the episode shows, on the level of the meta-text itself. Not stopping at referencing fandom in general, the producers therefore use the same scene to demonstrate their acute awareness of both the practice of fanfiction writing and its popular Wincest genre: When Dean realizes there are "slash fan[s]," Sam is quick to tell him that these write stories about them "[t]ogether," with his older brother immediately denouncing the idea as "sick." While Dean's comment could easily be construed as a condemnation of the fanauthors' activities and their productivity in this particular genre, Wincest writers have in contrast responded very positively to being mentioned on the show, recognizing the need for the *character* of Dean to strongly disprove of fans writing stories about a sexual relationship between his brother and himself: Echoing what Lisa Schmidt concludes in her analysis of fannish reactions to 4x18—that "even Dean's disgust at learning of the existence of Wincest was not taken as real criticism"—, Sister Magpie speaks for the community when she writes that,

> I didn't take it as anybody saying slash was sick, just that of course that's what Dean would say about stories where he was having sex with his brother. (And I liked the fact that his response was "They do know they're brothers, right?" as if the fact that slash is m/m was not a problem.)

Clearly, as Sister Magpie confirms, fanauthors read this scene as the producers' condoning their writing and, in particular, their slash writing since even in the show's universe that positions the brothers as heterosexual "m/m [is] not a problem."

Irrespective, however, of how one interprets Dean's reaction to discovering slash fanfiction about 'himself' and 'his brother,' this scene ultimately reveals in its running time of barely 90 seconds the attention the producers pay to fandom: In just a few lines, they thus disclose their familiarity with the factions among *SPN* fanauthors, the fans'

disposition to heavily criticize the meta-text, and their fanfiction writing. The showrunners' reference to Wincest and simpatico thereby testifies to the fact that they have more than a passing knowledge and have indeed spent considerable time online, researching their fans' activities, social spaces, and communities. Moreover, the episode's plot frequently reveals the appreciation the creators harbor for the show's fans, making space for them on the TV screen to have them actively participate in the meta-text. Not only do Dean and Sam function as objects of fandom in 4x18—as they are also characters in the novels that have spawned a fandom—but they are themselves frequently identified as fans as when they are mistaken for *LARP*ers in the episode's opening minutes or when Chuck later greets them with "it's always nice to hear from the fans." To intensify this amalgamation, the Winchesters have to actively take on the role of fans of the books when they need to convince Siege to help them with finding Chuck, posing as "big…big fans" that have turned to a fellow fan for assistance. In addition to the brothers resorting to fannish practices when they find out about the existence of the books—such as buying all the novels, reading them "[c]over to cover" and checking out the fan websites—, these instances have Sam and Dean virtually *be* fans: Multiple plot spins thus situate the show's protagonists *as* and *alongside* the show's online fandom, declaring them both equally important and influential in the course of the episode and in the show itself. Fandom has ceased to be an audience but instead becomes a 'protagonist'—fanauthors actively shape the meta-text, participate in its development, and, most of all, have agency.

The agency fans have in the meta-text and the production of *Supernatural* is, however, not limited to Sam and Dean and their simultaneous identity as protagonists and fans. Even more so, it becomes obvious in the character of the books' publisher Sera Siege, who amalgamates the roles of fan and producer in a hybrid construction that affirms the fans' activity and power. Clearly portrayed as a devoted fan who "lingers over her complete set of the novels, caressing their bindings lovingly" (Felschow), knows every minute detail of their fictional universe, and has even gotten the brothers' tattoo, she is at the same time introduced as the one who "published the *Supernatural* books" and thus has direct access to their author Chuck Shurley. Just like her having the power to divulge or withhold the information the Winchesters (in their role as 'fans') need, this overtly positions her as belonging to the producers, which is even underscored by the fact that her character was named after the show's executive producer Sera Gamble and the episode's writer Julie Siege (cf. TV Guide News; Felschow). As such, Sera Siege does not only

generally "blu[r] the line between creator and fan" (Sivarajan) but establishes an immediate and specific link between the show's producers and its fans that ultimately speaks for the agency *SPN*'s fanbase has in the process of production: In the brevity of one scene, Siege's amalgamation of the two identities completely eradicates the former binary and, with her tattoo, virtually transfers the power of the creator onto the body of the fan.

Nevertheless, what makes 4x18 even more special in the context of fans' agency is the fact that the episode does not only present different fannish roles, practices, and their empowerment via the producer-fan Sera Siege, but that it also gives wide room to the producers themselves to clarify their approach to the issue—and, at that, not only in the role of the novels' author but in the role of the "Author-God," or, as the episode later has it, a "Prophet of the Lord." To position him in this way, Chuck, whose pseudonym for publishing the *Supernatural* books is Carver Edlund—i.e. another mash up of names of the show's producers, which supports reading him as a spokesperson for *SPN*'s creative team as represented by the writers Jeremy Carver and Ben Edlund—, is immediately introduced as possessing the god-like power of omniscience. So notices Dean when reading the books that it is "freakin' insane" for the author to "know all this stuff" about their lives—an apparent absurdity that is even heightened through the visual presentation of the first meeting between the brothers and Chuck: While the viewer watches him reading out loud lines he has just been writing for his newest book, the very events he describes are unfolding unbeknownst to him outside of his house, where, as he says, Sam and Dean "approach[h] the ramshackle house with trepidation" and "trad[e] soulful looks" before "Dean pushe[s] the doorbell with forceful determination."

Vocalizing what these instances have already implied, Chuck then overtly assumes to be "a god" when he realizes that the two men in front of his door are in fact the "Dean and Sam [he has] been writing about," since he concludes that he obviously "write[s] things and then they come to life." While this and his later resignification as a divine prophet, who is pronounced to be "very special" and whose books, which will "be known as the Winchester gospel" or as the "new new testament," even angels "can't interfere" with, on a first glance seem to affirm the position of the producers of *Supernatural* as 'Author-Gods,' as the "very special" creators of the one and only meta-text of the "Winchester gospel" even fans should not "interfere" with, it becomes quite clear in the course of the episode that Chuck actually satirizes the idea of the author as god and as the

creator of the unalterable "inspired word." Far from disrupting the agency of the fans to participate in the production of text and their power to transform the uniform "testament" of the meta-text into a multi-voiced archive, Chuck instead affirms this very agency on several levels of his portrayal in the episode.

First, despite being introduced as omniscient or as a prophet, Chuck "isn't deciding anything"—he is a mere "mouthpiece" against which the characters can rebel and thus change the story according to their own purposes. As such, his initial reaction to Dean showing up at his house is surprise because "I didn't write this." Just like in the case of the fanauthors who alter the meta-text to what its authors "didn't write," his self-identification as a "god" does not stop events—i.e., read like that, the fans' writing—from happening: Sam and Dean, who he has initially perceived as fans of his, write their own texts and little heed what he thinks is the "Winchester gospel." Repeatedly, the two affirm that "[y]ou didn't create us," insisting on a life of their own that is independent from an alleged creator or author or god. In a second aspect, Chuck also easily lends himself to being read as a kind of fanwriter, which again speaks for the productive agency the creators of *Supernatural* attribute their own fans with: He is "intensely focused on [Sam's and Dean's] lives" and nothing can stop him from writing, not even the fact that his most recent "books never came out" after the "publisher went bankrupt." Both the allusion to the fannish pre-occupation with characters, whose individual presence or absence, for instance, provides a major organizing principle in the archives, and the fact that in the fannish gift economy stories are only ever written for the community and "never c[o]me out" officially make this scene pertinent to reinterpreting Chuck as an avatar for the thousands of fanauthors online who daily engage in writing about Sam's and Dean's lives in texts not available for purchase. Again, they and their practices are represented in the meta-text, shaping its course through their activity of fanfiction writing: After all, what Chuck does in writing a "new new testament" can, tongue in cheek, be considered transformative (fan)fiction of the Bible, albeit in form of a highly *AU* story that has the Winchesters replace Jesus as the 'protagonist.'

While Chuck has previously never been suggested to represent a personification of fanauthors, the show's producers have in fact confirmed him to be an avatar of *Supernatural*'s creator and long-time executive producer Eric Kripke, which, even more so than his pseudonym Carver Edlund, substantiates reading him as stand-in for the show's creative team. So affirms Rob Benedict that he was cast as "representing the

writers," only to realize in the course of filming that, "I'm Kripke, I've been Kripke this whole time" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, "Playing God"). Contrasted with how the episode portrays this role of Kripke/Chuck as a "god," it quickly becomes evident that neither Kripke personally nor the producers in general sought to utilize 4x18 as a reaffirmation of their own power as 'Author-Gods' and as a denial of the fans' agency; instead, the episode suggests just the opposite, since the fact that Chuck embodies Kripke/Carver/Edlund/the producers essentially needs to be considered an emphatic verification of fannish power because in effect he mocks the figure of the author rather than immortalizing it: Not only is Chuck shown as a social misfit, who fulfills all possible stereotypes of a writer as he lives in his own world without conforming to societal rules so as to cleaning, dressing properly, etc., but he is also subject to frequent ridicule in regard to his writing abilities, as when, for instance, Dean calls him nothing more than a "Penthouse Forum writer." Moreover, considering that Chuck substitutes for Kripke, his excuse to the Winchesters for the "bad writing" they have had to live through acquires additional significance as it markedly diminishes the status of the producers who here admit to their own "bad writing": Specifically singling out "the bugs" and "the ghost ship" as examples from his novels, Chuck overtly criticizes episodes 1x08 "Bugs" and 3x06 "Red Sky at Morning," which both fans and, as Benedict affirms, producers "didn't really like," giving the latter a chance to "apologize to the fans" in a "commentary on their own show" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, "Playing God").

While Benedict affirms in the same statement that *Supernatural* is unique in this "love letter" to its fans, the fact that his character is "clearly a parody of Kripke himself" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 160) also allows another reading of the episode which upholds the significance fannish practices have in the program to suggest an increasing equalizing of the agency of fans and producers. With Chuck, the creator of the *Supernatural* novels, standing in for Kripke, the creator of the *Supernatural* show, Kripke has accordingly written "a Mary Sue/Marty Stu self-insertion narrative with himself as the divinely inspired hero" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 162) that illustrates his awareness of fannish writing online in that he, first, employs the genre as such and, secondly, has Chuck correspond to many of its tropes: In true Mary Sue tradition, Chuck is an extraordinary character, a "god" or a "Prophet of the Lord," which sets him apart from society on the one hand and simultaneously positions him as the "center of the known universe" (Pflieger) on the other. Moreover, Kripke does not limit himself to

demonstrating his knowledge of fanfiction but also makes Chuck comment on his writing himself into the show as a Mary Sue: As the episode positions Chuck as a prophet who re-tells the lives of both Sam and Dean, he is not only the novels' author but, as he encounters the Winchesters in the course of the episode, also becomes a character in his own books—in addition to Kripke writing a Mary Sue with Chuck, Chuck thus writes a Mary Sue story of his own within the plot of the episode. When Dean realizes that Chuck has withheld this self-insertion into the novels/their lives from the brothers, he confronts him about it, shocked at the author's aggrandized self-stylization as a "god" or a "prophet," which in turn has Chuck reply that he has kept silent about it because he realizes that "writing yourself into the story is one thing, but as a prophet" it is "too preposterous," "arrogant," and "M.Night-level douchiness."[176] Denouncing his own self-insertion, Chuck here clearly serves to expose Kripke's Mary Sue story to ridicule, since the latter—in the character of Chuck—also committed this very same "preposterous" act of impersonating a prophet in his own text. In the end, Kripke's Mary Sue and Chuck's Mary Sue therefore both contribute to fannish empowerment since they reveal, on the one hand, the showrunners' familiarity with and use of the genre and, on the other, mock the creators at the same time.

The 'arrogance' of the producers in appropriating the fanfiction genre of Mary Sue thus ultimately validates reading Chuck not as the omniscient and infallible "Author-God" which he is first ostensibly presented as but instead makes him embody the significance of fannish practices in the show's meta-text: As a (fan)author, he writes Mary Sue stories—and, although first unknowingly, also RPF, because the characters in his novels, i.e. Sam and Dean, are actually 'real' in the fictional universe of the show (cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 162)[177]; as Kripke, he ridicules the figure of the author, while he simultaneously puts a fanfiction genre on screen for every fanwriter to see. In this way, his character supports the episode's general affirmation of fans and, in particular, fanauthors, who find multiple entryways into the meta-text as "Sam girls," as "slash fan[s]," or even in the form of Sam and Dean, the protagonist-fans, and of Sera Siege, the producer-fan. Declaring the very existence of the "Author-God"—of the creators of the meta-text as god-like figures—

[176] "M.Night-level douchiness" refers to the Indian-American director M. Night Shyamalan, who frequently appears in cameos in his own movies (cf., for instance, M. Night Shyamalan's page on *IMDb*, the *Internet Movie Database*).

[177] Zubernis and Larsen point out that "The Monster at the End of This Book" also incorporates another instance of the show's creative team writing RPF, since simpatico—who is a real fan—appears in the meta-text in fictionalized form (*Fandom* 162).

to be "preposterous," 4x18 accordingly both dethrones the producers and makes space for the show's fandom and its practices: Fanauthors and fanfiction participate in the meta-text, with their writing an essential part of the episode that grants them visibility, demonstrates the archontic nature of the meta-text, and ultimately illustrates the efficacy of their textual strategies aimed at expressing their claims to have a share in processes of production.

After this episode, its revolutionary acts of making space for fanauthors, making fanfiction visible, and having fandom participate would become dominant themes of the show. Only briefly later would thus happen what Mia Nina in her reaction to 4x18 still called the "[n]ext step," i.e. *Supernatural* did in fact "transplant true blue fanfiction to the screen" in episode 5x01 "Sympathy for the Devil"—an episode that introduced the *Supernatural* books' "number one fan" Becky, showed her writing Wincest fanfiction, and gave her a "role vital to the plot" as the producers' specific "nod to the importance of fandom to [the series of] *Supernatural*" (M.Gray). Airing as the season opener on 10 September 2009 under the premise of Sam and Dean having to prevent Lucifer's coming to earth after his escape from confinement as this would set off the Apocalypse, 5x01 simultaneously brought back the character of Chuck and, despite the fact that 4x18 had already been "so meta I felt like I wasn't watching Supernatural anymore, but some fan-made imposter" (Bloody Marie), stepped up the ante to surpass everything TV had ever before seen in terms of representing fandom (cf. Sivarajan).

Even though both Chuck and Becky appear for less than four minutes of the episode, their two scenes remove all doubts of whether the show's producers are truly aware of their fans and their online activities. While Chuck resumes his role as the prophet/author of the *Supernatural* novels, the "slash fan[s]" Dean discovered in 4x18 now also find their embodiment on the show, appearing in form of a character that actively participates in the plot of the meta-text: The scenes that would prompt intense reactions on the Internet (cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 163-68; M. Gray; Schmidt; Fathalla) open with a young woman, soon revealed to be the *SPN* novels' "number one fan" Becky Rosen, aka "samlicker81," "[w]ebmistress at morethanbrothers.net," who is sitting at her computer in her room full of *Supernatural* posters and memorabilia—and is typing. With her reading out loud what she is just in the process of composing and the camera zooming onto her screen, viewers become quickly aware of what exactly she has been writing—namely, Wincest fanfiction, and, at that, a "fine example of the Wincest genre, combining an irrelevant demon with a classic hurt/comfort narrative and the

eroticization of a specific body part" that unmistakably illustrates the extent to which "Kripke is familiar with the genre and its tropes" (Wilkinson).

In short, Becky's fanfiction reads as if taken straight from the fanauthors themselves—or as if written by one her-/himself:

> Sam shivered as he leaned against the splintered wooden wall of the barn. His shoulder ached from his fight with the demon spawn Mar-Delok and his clothes were soaked from the cold rain which fell outside. He let the knife fall into the dust and turned to his brother.
> Dean was shaken up. His chest was heaving with exertion and his shredded shirt was barely clinging to his muscular frame. Sam could see he was hurt.
> "Hey. Are you ok?" Sam stepped closer and put his arms around Dean. "We're going to get out of this, they can't keep us here long."
> The brothers huddled together in the dark as the sound of the rain drumming on the roof eased their fears of pursuit. Despite the cold outside and the demons who, even now, must be approaching, the warmth of their embrace comforted them.
> And then Sam ~~touched~~ caressed Dean's clavicle.
> "This is wrong," said Dean.
> "Then I don't want to be right," replied Sam, in a husky voice.

While after the episode an unknown fanauthor would continue the story, now entitled "Burning Desires," and post it online under Becky's psydonym of samlicker81, thus creating fanfiction about the show's fanfiction that builds on the fans' fanfiction, the scene does not at all stop at displaying that the "creator of the show that inspired Wincest writes Wincest" (Wilkinson; also cf. Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 164); instead, Becky now goes on to acquire an important role in the episode's—if not in the entire season's—plot through a call from Chuck, who approaches her because she is "the only one who will believe [him]" and he needs "[her] help" to "get a message to Sam and Dean." Although she first reassures him that she "know[s] the difference between fantasy and reality," since, to her, Sam and Dean are just fictional characters in the novels, and emphasizes that she might be "a fan, but […] [does]n't appreciate being mocked," Chuck can persuade her to contact the brothers for him—only for her to be completely overwhelmed when she finally meets them in person in the next scene: As a "Sam girl" (4x18), she displays what Zubernis and Larsen call "inappropriate" (*Fandom* 164) fan behavior, touching Sam to see whether he is "so firm" as in her imagination, announcing that she has "read all about you guys," and almost revealing her Wincest writing.

Although Becky's scenes for this episode end here, her brief appearance eradicates any distance between *SPN*'s fans and creative team and has fans participate in the meta-

text to an unprecedented degree. With Becky's story, the producers show that they are not only aware of Wincest fanfiction as in 4x18 but instead write it themselves, indicating through their attention to the "shredded shirt" that is "barely clinging to [Dean's] muscular frame," the fact that he is "hurt," and their plot that has Sam use Dean's injury to start "caress[ing] Dean's clavicle" that they have truly internalized the characteristics of Wincest. Moreover, Dean's initial reluctance to engage in a slash relationship with his brother follows a popular trope of the genre, and even the setting, while only briefly sketched as a barn in a cold, rainy night where the two are all alone while awaiting demonic attack, fits what Flegel and Roth have concluded to be a dominant theme in Wincest fanfiction, i.e. that it is "often dark and focuses upon images of claustrophobia, desperation, and suffering." Last but not least, the very detail of Becky substituting the word "touched" by "caressed" provides another instance through which the producers display their familiarity with Wincest, demonstrating that they have devoted attention to even the writing style of much of its texts: "Kripke," Psyche626 waxes enthusiastically, "has really *read* this stuff." In the less than 200 words of the story, the creators of *SPN* therefore reveal that they have become fans and fanauthors themselves, going online to read, and going on screen to write.

With Becky's story, what has often been only implied before now finds its representation on the screen, with both fanfiction and Wincest overtly included in the meta-text to shape it significantly in regard to fannish participation. Moreover, it indicates, first, the showrunners' apparent consent[178] to the fans' resignification of the meta-text as a democratic archive, which here even filters back into the meta-text itself, and, secondly, it also establishes a certain level of equality between fans and producers because now both parties engage in the very same activity of writing fanfiction. Distinctly introduced as a fanauthor, Becky thus makes the tens of thousands of fanwriters in the fandom participate in the creation of the meta-text and have an impact on its universe—especially since Becky will continue to have tremendous influence on the show's plot in the course of the season. Accordingly, getting called by Chuck in 5x01 initiates her role as a vital source of information that changes the lives of the Winchesters and the future of their world: In this

[178] Again, this scene certainly allows a reading that puts more emphasis on the possible commercial interest the producers may pursue with integrating fanfiction into the meta-text: Instead of becoming fans and fanauthors themselves, the creative team might simply show here how easy it is for them to adopt the fannish style and genres and how this can be used to demonstrate a closeness to the show's fandom that might not be grounded in facts.

first episode already, she—the fan—is the one whom Chuck—the creator of the books/Kripke/the "Author-God"—contacts to instruct Sam and Dean about where to find the "Michael sword," i.e. the sword of the archangel who "booted Lucifer's ass to the basement" during the "last big dust-up upstairs." In short, Becky's message to the Winchesters gives them the means to fight Lucifer and in consequence stop the Apocalypse.

In addition to Becky delivering this all-important information, the significance 5x01 illustrates fans to have in the *Supernatural* universe is enhanced by the fact that the author does even more than contacting someone who also happens to be a fan—Chuck approaches her *because* she is a fan: As his "number-one fan," she is made out to be the "only one" who will believe that the novels have actually come true and that Chuck is being watched and threatened by the forces of Lucifer. In consequence, M. Gray notes that "TPTB [*The Powers That Be*/the producers] have not been committing gratuitous fan portrayal" with introducing characters such as Becky, since "[i]n every episode in which they've appeared, not only have fans played a role vital to the plot, but their fannishness is also vital to their role." Similarly, CordeliaGray echoes scholarly opinion in her response to the episode on *Television without Pity*, stressing, however, that Becky's role here is not only "vital to the plot" but has more far-reaching implications in terms of fannish agency and the relation between the fanauthors and the producers:

> This is the only show I can think of which has actually integrated it's own fanbase into its universe, and the fact that she was being used to carry messages from the writer-proxy to the characters seems to me to be a reflection of the writers respect for the fans' involvement—that the writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved on some level in collectively creating the world of the show. It […] also implies a level of geekiness/fannishness on the part of the writers. And honestly, Becky may have been a little embarrassing to watch as a fan, but look how the writers portray themselves: Chuck is an alcoholic loser who lives a squalid, reclusive existence because he is essentially unfit for human company, and he has poured his entire life and creative soul into a series of mass-market paperbacks with Fabio knock-off covers. And yet, when called upon, he rises to the occasion magnificently, as does Becky.

Explicitly, this fan points out how *Supernatural* distinguishes itself from other shows by "integrat[ing] it's own fanbase into its universe," singling out Becky's function in this episode as an overt marker of the producers' "respect for the fans' involvement"—that they recognize the fanauthors' presence, opinions, and in particular, their activities as an essential part of "collectively creating the world of the show." With Becky, in other words, the showrunners have created a character that allows them to not only represent

fans and fan-works within the meta-text but that serves as a medium to convey the fanauthors' agency within the actual production process: In *Supernatural*, the fans and producers work side by side to create and enlarge the show's fictional universe, to expand its archive, and to produce the meta-text itself.

Referring to the producers' "fannishness," i.e. reframing them as virtually being fans themselves, CordeliaGray therefore reads 5x01 as particular testimony to the fanwriters' power and agency, which is even underscored by Becky rising "to the occasion magnificently." Moreover, she also addresses the scene in which Becky meets Sam and Dean, displaying aforementioned signs of overdone fan behavior that caused some negative reactions among fans online (cf. Schmidt): While she calls it "a little embarrassing," echoing what others have said (cf., for example, Cieley; Celastrina), she also relates it immediately to the self-deprecating and almost stereotypical portrayal of Chuck (4x18; 5x01), who in turns casts the producers in a negative light. In the end, Becky's über-devotion may thus not be meant to denigrate fandom—since that would not correspond to the rest of the episode that so apparently appreciates fans and their contributions—but may rather represent another example of what Kripke said at Comic-Con in July 2009 in regard to 4x18: "I have such a tempestuous, loving, conflicted relationship with the online fandom that… I was attracted to the possibility of poking… very loving fun"—"poking loving fun," as Felschow amends, "not only at the fans, but also at themselves."[179] After all, Chuck is shown just as clichéd as Becky, and her writing Wincest, her participation, and, most of all, her essential function in the plot still dominate the episode.

[179] While Becky's portrayal may have been "a little embarrassing" (CordeliaGray), it nevertheless may be, as Zubernis and Larsen point out, not too far-fetched: In the case of Becky needing to touch Sam, for instance, "many fans could relate to the wish to check out Sam Winchester's impressive physique for themselves, whether they'd be comfortable admitting it or not" (*Fandom* 165). Confirming this statement, fans themselves recognize the similarities between Becky's behavior and their own, which prompts, for instance, kcblue86 to ask others, "Ok, which one of you was the basis for Becky?" Analogously, omaroca states that Becky "has to be based on a real fan, with all the 'feeling Sam up' stuff. :) Either that or it's based on [producer] Sera Gamble."

Apart from the fact that Becky may represent fans in general, her character can also be read as another affirmation of how intensely the producers follow fannish activities online, as—just like with simpatico in 4x18—there is indeed a fan called Becky, who, as Gwonk points out, "helps run Winchester Radio" (9:11 p.m.). What is more, only minutes later Sister Spooky replies to this identification of Becky, clarifying, "That is me! If they named this Becky after me, I am thrilled! Plus, I'm a huge Sam!Girl!" Favoriting the same brother as Becky, she does not at all take issue with Becky's portrayal but, conversely, is "thrilled" about possibly being represented in the meta-text.

Furthermore, Becky's role is not restricted to 5x01, which already has her influence the course of the whole season in content and simultaneously affirm the co-creative relationship of producers and fans in function, but her character continues to majorly contribute to both single episodes and the show's general plot. As such, she, together with Chuck, reappears soon after in 5x09 "The Real Ghostbusters," another episode that generously represents fandom and fannish activities, and reveals the creative team's intimate awareness of fanfiction. Airing on 12 November 2009, 5x09 picks up on 4x18's premise that the *Supernatural* novels have a small but vibrant following of fans, who organize fan conventions and heavily engage in fanfiction writing or *LARP*ing. Accordingly, the episode opens with Sam and Dean unknowingly showing up at the "first annual Supernatural convention" that brings together Chuck and dozens of fans—among them Becky—to meet each other, discuss the novels, and to act out the "big hunt," a *LARP*ing game that has the convention attendants "hunt down the ghost" haunting their hotel. As inadvertent participants, the Winchesters attend panels, listen to Chuck discussing their fictional lives with their fans, and meet *LARP*ers, i.e. fans who role-play characters from the books,—only to soon realize that the "big hunt" may be intended as a "game" but that the hotel is in fact haunted. When the ghosts start killing some of the fans present, the brothers are spurred into action, but, instead of being alone in their efforts to stop the ghosts as usual, they are joined by two of the attending fans, Demian and Barnes, who play the novels' characters of 'Dean' and 'Sam' at the convention and mistake the 'real' Dean and Sam for other *LARP*ers throughout the entire episode. Eventually, all ghosts are vanquished but it is not the Winchesters who are successful but Demian and Barnes who save the day. 5x09 ends with revealing the two to be a couple, and, picking up on a side plot, with Becky giving up her admiration of Sam for a relationship with Chuck and providing the Winchesters with an important piece of information from the books that significantly aids the brothers in their future hunts.

While "The Real Ghostbusters" does not focus on Becky as much as on Demian and Barnes, she has nonetheless a central part in its plot: She is the one that makes the brothers come to the convention in the first place and then uses her fan knowledge to give them a "lead on the Colt," a powerful weapon that can kill almost any supernatural being. Having taken this information from "chapter 33 of *Supernatural, Time Is on My Side*," she trumps with her expertise even the novels' author Chuck, who has to admit that he "didn't remember" that because he is "not as much of a fan as she is." Again, it is her identity as

an avid fan that allows her to considerably influence the plot and even major story-arcs of the meta-text since Dean will later use the Colt in an attempt to kill Lucifer. Beyond that, however, fannish empowerment and the fans' significance in the production of the meta-text become even more obvious in the telling emotional turnaround Becky experiences: As she has been established as one of the "Sam girls" (4x18), the episode initially focuses on her continued adoration of Sam and, in matters of romance, disregard of Chuck, who seems to have fallen in love with her; the last scene, conversely, shows that the recent events have made her change her mind: "Chuck and I," she tells Sam, "we found each other. […] [T]he heart wants what the heart wants." The ending of 5x09 thus has Becky, the fan, and Chuck, the author, engage in a romantic relationship that ultimately closely mirrors the intimate relationship the fans and producers of *Supernatural* have: The couple in the meta-text affirms the equal standing of both parties outside of the meta-text—that "Chuck/Kripke is literally in bed with his fans can be seen as indicative of the fact that we—the creator, the actors and the fans—are all in this together" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 170). As in 5x01, Becky ultimately represents the fanauthors' participation and *Supernatural*'s unique identity as a participatory TV show that positions fans and producers side by side.

What Wilkinson calls "Kripke's most definitive statement," i.e. that the "creator falls in love with the fangirl," does nevertheless not at all remain the only affirmation of fannish agency in this episode. More unmistakably indicative of the fans' participatory power are the fannish protagonists in this episode, Demian and Barnes, aka 'Dean' and 'Sam.' While the two are introduced as conforming to common negative stereotypes of fans—Demian, for instance, is rather overweight, they have "met online" in a "Supernatural chat room" and their lives outside of fandom "suck" as they regard their jobs of "sell[ing] stereo equipment" and "fix[ing] copiers" as the epitome of insignificance and boredom—, the episode reconstructs them in the course of events as true heroes who save everyone in the hotel, including the Winchesters. Living through a story of initiation/empowerment, they are initially perceived by Sam and Dean as "freakin' annoying" fans who are above all too dedicated, with Sam pronouncing their playing them as, "this cannot get any weirder." When the brothers then begin their hunt for the ghosts in the guise of participating in the "big hunt," Demian and Barnes, however, are the first to find a clue to the whereabouts of the bones they have to salt and burn to vanquish them. Significantly, it is therefore they—as fans—who enable Sam and Dean to stop the ghosts,

and, in addition, their perspective once again positions the Winchesters as fans in analogy to 4x18, since they consider them to be regular convention attendants just like themselves. What is more, Demian and Barnes subsequently insist on actually participating in the destruction of the bones, and, sure of their power as the finders of the much-needed map, they even make demands so that, when successful, they "get the sizzler gift card" for winning the *LARP*ing and, most importantly, they "get to be Sam and Dean" throughout the "big hunt"—i.e. they will play the roles of the two brothers instead of the 'real' Sam and Dean. Symbolic of the fans' agency within *Supernatural*, Dean agrees to this proposition, thus conforming, first, to being constructed as a fan and, secondly, yielding his position as one of the protagonists within the game—yielding his position to a fan, at that—in a decision that illustrates fannish participation within the meta-text: They get to be the 'protagonists,' they have a central part in creating and shaping the fictional universe of the show.

Consequential of this demand for participation on part of the fannish *LARP*ers, the episode gives Demian and Barnes the chance to further affirm the agency and power of fans. Although the four of them are initially unsuccessful in vanquishing the ghosts, Demian and Barnes assume a pivotal role in the Winchesters' second attempt to stop them when the killing starts in earnest and puts everyone in the hotel in danger. In a complete reversal of their rather negative portrayal in the first segment of the episode, they finally prove to be courageous and altruistic because even the fact that they are "freakin' terrified" does not stop them from wanting to "help" and "do something." In the end, Demian and Barnes do even more than "help," asserting fannish agency when they singlehandedly manage to exterminate the ghosts—which is even intensified by the fact that these are just about to kill the incapacitated Winchesters. Bringing the story of empowerment to full circle, Dean ultimately affirms that, "I gotta hand it to you, guys. You really saved our asses back there. So, ah, you know, thanks." Reading this as a "love letter to fandom and an expression of appreciation to the fans who, quite literally, have saved the Show season after season" (*Fandom* 170), Zubernis and Larsen recognize the agency this episode demonstrates fans to have: It is not they who are incapacitated and about to be killed—that is, powerless—but instead the meta-text needs their 'saving' to keep it on air, to keep it continuing. Singularly, this episode thus demonstrates the power of fans in its plot, transforming the fannish support of the show into making two fanboys the saviors of the Winchester brothers and giving them full agency over events. In

Supernatural, the fans participate, they find the clues, they save everyone; their archive keeps the show on air, continues it, enlarges it, makes it infinite; their activities influence the meta-text, alter it, revolutionize it through their participation.

In addition to Demian's and Barnes's capacity to shape the plot, exert agency, and "sav[e the Winchesters'] asses," the fact that they appear as "partners," i.e. as a homosexual couple, increases the significance of their characters in respect to the participation of the fanauthors in the meta-text even more. Not only can *Supernatural* be read here as "slash[ing] its own fans" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 169) in a reference to the fanfiction practice of transforming the heterosexual (male) characters of the meta-text into homosexual characters, but, as the two scholars rightly allude, Demian and Barnes, who, after all, play Sam and Dean, may further be considered a "positive canon nod to Wincest" (*Fandom* 170). Except for the—highly unlikely—occurrence of the 'real' Sam and Dean breaking the incest taboo themselves in future seasons, the plot-twist of making the two fans "more than friends" allows the show to virtually bring Wincest on screen in essentially the only way it is possible for it to do so apart from Becky's fanfiction in 5x01. Having Demian/'Dean' and Barnes/'Sam' as "partners", however, *Supernatural* poignantly condones the fanfiction activities of its fans and even integrates them as "quasi-Wincest" (akksgurl) into the meta-text to affirm the intimate and reciprocal relationship between fanauthors and producers—who once again both write Wincest. Slashing 'Dean' and 'Sam' on screen thus validates this disputed fanfiction genre and simultaneously has the fanauthors participate in the meta-text, allowing the characters of Demian and Barnes to function as an important link between the show's creators and its fandom that visualizes the archontic nature of the meta-text and the democratic nature of its production.

Apart from Demian and Barnes referencing slash/Wincest fanfiction via their relationship, fans also read their names as *shout outs* to fandom since fans of the same name frequently post at the *Supernatural* forums on *Television without Pity* (cf., for example, valueofaloonie; amberdotcom; Invader Toph). Analogous to mentioning simpatico in 4x18, this illustrates once more that awareness of fandom and its activities plays a large role in this episode, filling the plot—literally—with life: Dozens of fans attend 5x09's "first annual Supernatural convention," which is clearly modeled after

Supernatural's own conventions.[180]Just like these, it accordingly relies heavily on the interaction between fans and producers, with Chuck once more slipping into Kripke's role when he—like the latter did a number of times 2007-2011—ascends the stage to answer questions from the novels' fans, who are interested in every minor detail of the books, criticize them for certain parts, and are absolutely delighted when he announces that he is "going to start publishing again."[181] Furthermore, the convention features different panels devoted to such topics as "Frightened Little Boy: The Secret Life of Dean" and "The Homoerotic Subtext of *Supernatural*," which, as Zubernis and Larsen assert, "could have been lifted directly from the most prevalent *Supernatural* […] fanfiction" (*Fandom* 169) and correspond to subjects discussed at previous fan conventions all over the United States and Europe. Even the fact that the fictional hotel in the episode serves cocktails called "yellow-eyed cooler" mirrors the practice of *SPN* convention hotels frequently re-naming their food and beverages in reference to the show: So report, for instance, Larsen and Zubernis, that at a Chicago convention they once had Purple Nurple cocktails, which Dean drinks in 2x15 "Tall Tales," and that the hotel also offered "Sam-tini or Dean-a-Rita" drinks together with the "Jensen Ackles Filet and the Jared Burger" (*Fangasm* 187).

Various further details such as references to a fannish nickname for Sam/Padalecki and to the fan-favorite genre of hurt/comfort fanfiction indicate the producers' awareness of fandom and the high level of attention they extend to their fanbase, so that fans, their activities, and fanfiction altogether loom large in the meta-text. Not even the fact that 5x09's convention considerably differs from reality in making most of the attendants male instead of female can refute this assessment, since that actually lends itself to reading this episode as the producers "writing a piece of AU fan fiction (about [their] own fans)" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 170). Representing their fandom so noticeably unlike reality suggests that the creators here engage in employing another distinctly fannish genre in the production process of *Supernatural*, adding AU to making space for slash/Wincest and RPF in their episodes. Since it is in this respect only that they create on screen a

[180] On top of that, 5x09 even aired the night before the *Salute to Supernatural Chicago 2009* convention, which lasted from 13-15 November 2009 and brought together fans and actors Padalecki, Ackles, Collins, Beaver, Benedict, and others.

[181] As in 4x18, the producers here continue to give Chuck the role of simultaneously emulating Kripke/the creative team and mocking them: While the fans at the convention at first hang onto his every word, they are later blatantly disinterested when he starts telling them about his own life in order to distract them from the ghost hunt going on in the hotel. Moreover, Chuck reaffirms his own assessment of his deplorable writing abilities from 4x18, complaining that "I'm not a good writer. I've got no marketable skills. I'm not some hero who can just hit the road and fight monsters."

decidedly different alternate universe in respect to fans throughout the entire show—and being as intensely familiar with their own fandom so as to include "Sam girls" and "Dean girls" (4x18), the tropes and language of Wincest (5x01), and individual fans by name—, the creative team can be said to know, as Becky says in 5x01, the "difference between fantasy and reality"; they accordingly use 5x09 not only to write Wincest, to display the fans' empowerment and agency in the meta-text, and to present the perfect union of fanauthors and showrunners but also to suggest a wider extent of their own fanfiction reading than previous episodes had illustrated so far.

To what significant extent the producers must have been reading fanfiction becomes immediately obvious in episode 6x15 "The French Mistake," which powerfully conveys to the fans that the producers "love us, too. They ***love*** us, dammit. They really do. And they are willing to say as much—to shout it from the mountaintops, even—and to do so in a language specific to, and limited to [*SPN*] fans" (dodger_winslow). Taken as an unequivocal avowal of the reciprocal relationship and mutual "love" between the show's creative team and its fanbase, 6x15, which aired on 25 February 2011, presents a marked contrast to the episodes discussed previously since it does not overtly feature fans or fannish activities but, as dodger_winslow so emphatically expresses, references fandom in a "language specific to" the show's fans. Unlike, for instance, 5x09, which asserts fannish agency and participation via making fans the heroes of its plot, legitimizing Wincest, and overtly portraying fannish practices, "The French Mistake" reads, in short, like a piece of RPF fanfiction put on screen, confirming the productive power of the fanauthors and their tremendous influence on the meta-text through employing one of their own specific genres. The episode's premise seems simple enough: The angel Balthazar, who is allied with the Winchesters, warns them that the archangel Raphael is attempting to kill them and advises them to "[r]un." Since he informs neither the brothers nor, for that matter, the viewers, of his plan to keep them out of harm's way by sending them to an alternate reality, both are taken completely unawares when Sam and Dean unexpectedly land on a mattress on a TV set, with someone in the background shouting "Cut!" before commenting, "Jared, Jensen! Outstanding! That was just great."

Beginning with the Winchesters' shocked faces, this moment sets off 40 minutes of continuous *shout outs* to the fandom, making the episode a "love letter of the truest kind" (dodger_winslow) to *Supernatural*'s fanauthors through its incessant references to fanfiction and the close relation between the creative team and fans alike. While ostensibly

the plot of 6x15 revolves around the Winchesters needing to protect from Raphael a key that opens the way to "every weapon Balthazar stole from Heaven," it is nothing more than a ruse to show Dean and Sam trying to get their bearings in Jensen's and Jared's world,[182] resulting in many moments when their respective universes clash: As such, Sam/Jared meets 'his'/Jared's wife, the 'producers' get frustrated with the non-existent acting abilities of Dean/'Jensen' and Sam/'Jared,' and everyone on set is astounded that the two brothers/'actors' are actually "talking to each other," since in this reality Jared and Jensen do not seem to be on speaking terms. In the course of events, the Winchesters thus meet their 'fellow actor' Misha (Collins), a number of the 'producers' with Eric (Kripke), Bob (Singer), Serge (Ladouceur), and others, all the while they are actually trying to devise a plan for returning to their own reality—which they finally manage to at the end of the episode despite the intervention of the angel Virgil, who has come to retrieve the key and eliminates most of the 'cast and crew' in a killing spree. Back in their "moldy, termite-eaten home sweet home," Sam knocks on the wall, relieved that "[i]t's real. Nice."

A meta-reference in itself, Sam's words and actions at the very end of the episode stress the fact that virtually every minute of 6x15 breaks the fourth wall "into such tiny pieces it's doubtful that reconstruction is an option" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 171). Continuously, the show demonstrates that it is aware of its own fictionality, highlighting the co-existence of 'reality,' 'fictionality,' and 'fictional reality' through its plot, which above all draws attention to the friction that results from superimposing these layers by having the Winchesters struggle with their new lives: Dean, for instance, is horrified when he discovers that he is wearing make-up, referring to Jensen as a "painted whore," and Sam panics when he is forced to give an interview as "Jared Padalecki from TV's *Supernatural*." Beyond these rather generic breakings of the fourth wall, which, albeit exceptionally cumulative in 6x15, would constitute not much more than further examples of an increasingly conventional device in TV making (cf., for example, Ross 12; Hills, "*Doctor Who*" 103; Gwenllian Jones, "Histories" 404-07), this episode, however, distinguishes itself by transcending mere self-referentiality in regard to its medium as a TV show: 6x15 does more than simply contribute to making the show a "poster child" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 157) for suspending the difference between text and audience, and its status as a "love letter […] to all of us fans out here in the world" (Jen)

[182] To facilitate reading, I use everyone's first names when I refer to the *fictional* representations of the actors and producers in 6x15; for example, Jensen for Jensen Ackles and Jared for Jared Padalecki. In all other cases, I use their last names.

results from more than interspersing throughout the episode a few additional "[i]n-jokes that only fans and the creative team would understand" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 172). Instead, *Supernatural* engages in 6x15 in an "intimate conversatio[n] with **US**, the fans, that—while the rest of the world may understand the words used in the speaking—[is] designed to speak solely to **US**, the fans" (dodger_winslow).

Clearly, dodger_winslow recognizes and emphasizes that "The French Mistake" heavily relies on knowledge restricted to devoted fans and long-time fanauthors as they are the only ones who have full access to and can participate in the "intimate conversatio[n]." While some of the episode's self-referentiality is certainly accessible to the average viewer who is familiar with what is involved in shooting a TV show (such as the make-up reference mentioned above or the Winchesters' discovery that their weapons are all "rubber") or to the casual fan who may know that Ackles and Padalecki are, as both have repeatedly said, "best friends" (cf., for example, MacKenzie) instead of not "talking to each other," the "[i]n-jokes" that build on fanfiction, on the details of the real lives of Ackles, Padalecki, Collins, and others of the creative team, and on the relationship between fans and producers on the show remain incomprehensible to anyone not participating in fandom. As such, fannish knowledge is, for instance, essential in fully understanding the background to Misha continuously tweeting his followers, the "Mishamigos," which first references Collins's prolific activities on *Twitter*, and secondly, plays with his practice of calling his fans "Misha's Minions"[183]; moreover, only devoted fans can appreciate Dean's shocked reaction of "You married fake Ruby?!" when Sam and Dean discover that Jared is married to his *Supernatural* co-star Genevieve (Cortese), i.e. Padalecki's real-life wife whom he met on set when she played the demon Ruby in earlier seasons. As the episode is rife with many similar examples, 6x15 presents in its entirety a "complicated mix of real/unreal," which depends on "an involved and informed fandom" to unravel (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 173).

Even more so, however, "The French Mistake" confirms dodger_winslow's assessment that it is "designed to speak solely to" *Supernatural*'s fans, since it presents

[183] To additionally blur the lines between reality and fiction, Collins also tweeted the very same words Misha tweeted onscreen the very moment the character sends off his messages in the episode, so that "fans watching the actor tweet on the show received the tweet on their [cell] phones at the same moment" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 172). This made cables, for instance, write that she "literally jumped out of my seat laughing when I got the first [tweet]!"

In addition, cf. Stein, "#Bowdown" for a contrastive analysis of Collins's and Misha's *Twitter* personas (415-16).

itself not only as rather inaccessible to non-fans but since it also "speak[s]" foremost to the show's fan*authors*—and so demonstrates that this group seems to be important enough so as to possibly alienate other viewers. Apart from having fans participate through making the episode depend on their knowledge in unraveling its *shout outs*, it thus illustrates their participation, their power, and agency in constructing its plot along the lines of the genre of RPF fanfiction, employing many of its tropes so as to make it virtually analogous to its stories. In this way, 6x15 represents the first episode in the course of the show that fundamentally draws on fannish activities *in function*, integrating fanfiction in its very structure to substantially affirm the power fanauthors have in *SPN*'s production. Instead of incorporating fanfiction on the level of plot only, as in 5x01, for example, "The French Mistake" demonstrates the willingness of the producers to give fans an essential share in the meta-text: The fact that both the structural level of plot and many details within the episode are heavily indebted to RPF fanfiction underscores the efficacy of the fannish strategies as outlined in the previous chapter—in RPF, they show their power and agency; RPF becomes a way for the producers to acknowledge this power and agency; RPF on screen visualizes the expansion of the fannish archive.

Just like 6x15, many RPF stories start out with the premise that Dean and Sam are transformed into Jared and Jensen either through being transported to an alternate reality as in this case, or, for instance, through a magic spell gone wrong. Similar to what the brothers experience in the episode, these fanfictions have them deal with their new lives as actors, a world without the supernatural, the idea that they "just don't mean the same thing" in their new reality, and, on top of that, the fact that they are "not even brothers" anymore. Instead of presenting them as being unable to cope, RPF tends to show them as being able to slowly accommodate to Jensen's and Jared's world, having them realize—like in the episode—that their life as actors has its advantages, since in a world with "[n]o hell below us, above us only sky," as Dean quotes a John Lennon song, they are not constantly in danger of losing their soul, being killed, or sent to hell. Although in 6x15 Dean comes to the conclusion that there is accordingly "no contest" between their two universes and that he would much prefer his new life, ultimately the episode also follows many RPF stories in that the two brothers eventually get back to their own reality. Together with some more parallels on the level of plot, these analogies illustrate that "The French Mistake" strikingly corresponds to one of the more popular tropes of RPF, which, although the genre certainly knows many different subgenres to make it just as

heterogeneous as FPF, speaks for the firm knowledge and intimate awareness the producers have of this form of fanfiction.

What additionally corroborates the creative team employing RPF as a model for 6x15 to acknowledge the participation of the show's fandom in the production of the show is the fact that the episode references RPF in many of its details that seem to be taken directly from the genre's fanon/meta-text. Their exact rendition and the sheer number of occurrences markedly underscore a reading of 6x15 as fanfiction "transplant[ed]" directly "to the screen" (Mia Nina) in an affirmation of the fanwriters' productive power. Accordingly, Misha, for instance, calls Jensen and Jared in one of his tweets "JSquared," which is the RPF fanauthors' label for slash stories involving Ackles and Padalecki; Bob informs Sera (Gamble) that "now Jensen's living at Jared's house," which does not only refer to Ackles moving in with Padalecki for some time in the show's early seasons but alludes to the premise of a good part of the "JSquared"-stories online that have them sharing a house, a life, and, often, Padalecki's dogs that make a quasi-appearance as an "alpaca" Jared has in 6x15; and when Dean starts to consider staying in Jensen's and Jared's universe since here the brothers have a "pretty good life" as "bazillionaire[s]," his thought process picks up on the fact that RPF fanfiction—both the stories that have Dean and Sam transform into Jensen and Jared, and those that focus on the actors from the start—preferably situates its characters in a "good life" as an alternative to the Winchesters' outsider existence, which is dominated by being "broke," having to be constantly on the run because the "hits have been coming since [Sam was] six months old," and being all-isolated from society: So write Flegel and Roth, for example, that

> J2 RPS [alternative form of *JSquared*] tends to place the boys within communities of friends and family, whereas the [FPS] slash focuses in large part on the boys' isolation; J2 stories are often light-hearted in tone, while the slash is often dark […]; the happy ending […] is far more common in J2 RPS, and […] the union achieved between Jared and Jensen [is] not only […] coded as healthy and stable, but focuses on what Sam and Dean often specifically lack: the support of a larger community, of which the romantic couple is only a part.

Further details such as Dean's explanation for having come to Jared's house to "run some lines"—a reason that features large in RPF stories for one of the characters to show up at the other's home—strongly suggest that RPF seems to have been a major influence for producing the episode, with the creative team freely drawing on its features and tropes to write a "love letter of the truest kind" (dodger_winslow) to its fanauthors. Evidenced by its plot and the many elements that reference RPF, "The French Mistake"

gives fanfiction space within the meta-text, illustrating that in *Supernatural* the fans have a share in the production process of the show as their transformative fiction provides a kind of blueprint for what later appears on the screen. In the end, 6x15 therefore demonstrates through its emphasis on fannish knowledge and use of fanfiction that the creative team no longer functions as the only 'creative' part, since it is the fans whose creativity vitally contributes to the meta-text: On a different level than previous episodes, "The French Mistakes" acknowledges their power through "actually transplant[ing] true blue fanfiction to the screen" (Mia Nina).

While many further facets of the episode reinforce the intense awareness the creators of the meta-text have of what the show's fandom is talking about and writing online, 6x15 acquires additional significance in the context of fannish agency through the role the producers of the fictional TV show of *Supernatural* have in its 42 minutes. Their portrayal reinforces the changed status and the participation of fans within the production of *SPN*, exceeding in its explicitness even the attention which the creators have devoted to fannish preferences and which is mirrored in lines like director Bob's "You answer the [fans'] hate mail" when first assistant director Kevin (Parks) suggests "blow[ing] off the scene where they sit on the Impala and talk about their feelings"—lines that reference that fans particularly enjoy the by now stereotypical minutes at the end of an episode that have the Winchesters discuss their relationship, and that *SPN* fans are exceptionally vocal in complaining about whatever irks them about the show. Even though details like these majorly contribute to the episode's positive reception in fandom as testimony of the intimate relationship between fans and producers, the fact that "Sera and the writers kept poking themselves in the eye" (mustbekarma) provides a decidedly new angle to the showrunners affirming the fans' agency and acknowledging their own diminished power in the show's production. Significant in this respect is above all the fact that, rather than using Chuck as a stand-in for Kripke/the creators like in previous episodes, the producers actually appear as 'themselves' in 6x15 and various members of the creative team either play their own parts, such as actors Misha (Collins) and Genevieve (Padalecki née Cortese), stunt coordinator Lou (Bollo), and stunt doubles Mike (Carpenter) and Todd (Scott), or have an actor represent them, such as executive producers Eric (Kripke) and Sera (Gamble; voice only), co-executive producer Jim (Michaels), director Bob (Singer), director of photography Serge (Ladouceur), assistant director Kevin (Parks), and driver Clif (Kosterman).

While some of them, like Ackles's and Padalecki's driver Clif or their stunt doubles Todd and Mike, only play minor roles, and Genevieve appears as Jared's wife instead of reprising her role on the show, it is in particular the members of the creative team actively involved in producing, writing, and directing *SPN* who assert that they are no longer the only ones in a position of power. Both the episode's plot and their characterization thus actively negate that the showrunners could be powerful figures, casting a negative light on them as weak, passive, and, in the end, even superfluous. Throughout 6x15, Bob, Serge, Kevin, and Jim, for example, appear to be helpless in face of the difficulties the 'new' Jensen and Jared present to shooting *Supernatural*: So have already the first minutes of the episode Bob, Serge, and Kevin settle on a merely "[s]erviceable," i.e. a clearly less-than-perfect solution for the sequence that Dean's and Sam's reaction to their sudden arrival on set interfered with; what is more, they do not reshoot the scene because they are afraid of the fannish "hate mail" delay would result in. Analogously, a later part of the episode that has the Winchesters trying to act—and, of course, failing spectacularly—ends with a similar compromise, with the three creators agreeing on a "sort of experimental" scene to be able to move on with their shooting schedule. Although they profess to be appalled at the "atrocity [that] is happening" before their eyes, the producers remain passive and do not even try to exert any power on the 'actors': Besides not being forced to improve their acting, Dean and Sam have virtually free rein on the set, using it for performing a spell that is intended to get them back to their own reality, and come and leave whenever it suits them. Instead of being in command, the showrunners easily give in to both *SPN*'s protagonists and, significantly, to (fannish) pressure from outside; they give up their alleged artistic integrity for the sake of simply "[m]oving on" with filming.

Powerlessness continues to characterize the producers throughout the entire episode: When Bob, Kevin, and Jim realize that they cannot bring 'Jared' and 'Jensen' back to order, they call Sera to ask for assistance, having to resort to a person from the outside to solve their internal problems. Her tentative suggestion that she "fly up and talk to them" reveals her own helplessness, which is even underscored by Jim refuting her proposal due to the fact that Jared and Jensen do not "know who she is, strictly speaking. She's, you know, new." Referencing the fact that Gamble replaced Kripke as *Supernatural*'s executive producer only a short while before 6x15, Jim's words expose her as just as powerless as the others and makes clear that, even though she is technically in

charge, she has no agency within the show and its production—a notion that is highlighted by the scene's visual presentation that has Sera 'appear' in this episode only as a disembodied voice heard over the speakerphone. The further course of the sequence continues to position Sera as fundamentally incapable while simultaneously highly concerned about her outward status: In response to Bob's idea that they involve Eric since Jensen and Jared will "listen to him" as "[h]e created the show," she discredits herself by complaining, "How's that make me look? I'm supposed to be running this thing." Along with Bob, Kevin, Jim, and Serge, the episode thus portrays Sera as an inherently weak figure in the production process of the show instead of characterizing them as powerful showrunners: None of them seems to be able to exert any agency, with all of the members of the creative team *re*acting to events instead of acting and more concerned about schedules or their own status than with directing events—than with being in power.

This striking representation of the producers as helpless, incapable, and passive is even enhanced by the appearance of Eric himself late in the episode. His arrival on set in a Hummer sets the tone for his portrayal as an inflated and aloof person and as someone who is more concerned about publicity than about the people producing 'his' show: His only reaction to Misha's death—he was shortly before killed by the angel Virgil—is that it "got us the front page of *Variety*." Although brief, the entire scene dwells on highlighting Eric as an unsympathetic and bombastic character, who significantly overestimates his influence on people and his power to change events. An almost comic figure in his simpleminded idea to solve the problem with Jared and Jensen by him simply "bust[ing] in their trailer, guns blazing," he casts the producers in a negative, albeit somewhat "funny" (Aeryn13), light—a portrayal that in its implications for the creators of the meta-text is only surpassed by the fact that Eric, together with many other members of the creative team, does not survive this episode: Virgil returns to the set and shoots him in a dramatic scene that involves three bullets, slow motion, a lot of blood, and *Desperado*-style music—for absolutely everyone to see, the show has killed its "Author-God."

In the end, the "Author-God" is dead: Eric, Bob, Kevin, and Lou have not survived Virgil's killing spree in what amounts to an unprecedented statement within the show, i.e. that its producers are not only "bad" writers like Chuck (4x18; 5x09) but that they are practically superfluous. *Supernatural* does not need its creators; moreover, it gets rid of them itself. Together with their characterization as powerless, passive, and weak throughout the episode, 6x15 thus makes a clear statement in regard to the position of the

showrunners within the production process of the show: Their death leaves someone else in power, their absence makes space for the fans to enter the meta-text and its creation. The fact that the episode is structured like an RPF story with many elements taken from fanfiction and fandom in general indicates that the fanauthors can indeed be considered the designated successors of the dead authors; they move into the empty space left by Eric and the power vacuum left by Sera. Unlike any previous episode, "The French Mistake" accordingly asserts the agency of *Supernatural*'s fanauthors, presenting a comprehensive picture of the relation between fans and producers on the show through its characters, plot, and structure. Its satirical twist of virtually killing the latter only reinforces the empowerment of the former, complementing the creators' passivity with physically removing them from the set. 6x15, to quote dodger_winslow once more, is "willing to shout [fannish agency] from the mountaintops […] in a language specific to, and limited to" *Supernatural*'s fans: "The French Mistake" proves the fanauthors' strategies to be effective.

A similar, if not quite as drastic proclamation of fannish agency occurs in 7x08 "Season Seven, Time for a Wedding," an episode that Trivet immediately pronounced "a Mary Sue fic brought to life." Airing on 11 November 2011, 7x08 brings back Becky, who has resumed her infatuation with Sam after having been "dumped" by Chuck. The episode opens with Sam's and Dean's "sacred annual pilgrimage to Vegas," where Sam unexpectedly informs Dean that he is "getting married." When his bride reveals herself to be Becky, Dean is incredulous, and he and the newlyweds go their separate ways since he cannot believe that Sam would marry "[s]uperfan 99." Soon, however, it becomes apparent that there is something odd about Sam suddenly being "in love": Becky has been drugging him with a "love potion" she has obtained from a demon who fulfills people's wishes in exchange for their souls. While the concoction works well at first, she rapidly runs out of it, which leads to Sam realizing that she has "roofied" him and her having to finally tie him to her bed to make him stay with her. Apparently immune to Sam's warnings of the demon, she then contacts the latter to get more of the potion to make Sam love her "for the rest of [her] life" but, upon meeting him to receive it, reveals that she has informed Dean and Sam of his plan to take her soul in exchange, because she has in the meantime recognized that she is "better than this." As the two brothers appear on the scene to exorcise the demon, Becky saves Sam's life in the ensuing fight and helps delivering the demon to the King of Hell for punishment. The episode ends with Sam and

Becky annulling their marriage and his affirmation that, despite her mistakes, she is "a good person."

Although many fans were "underwhelmed" (Nighteyes2) by the episode since they considered Becky drugging Sam a "huge problem" (jediknight), 7x08 nevertheless reads in much of its plot and many of its details like a Mary Sue story transferred to the television screen (cf. Trivet; Mia Nina). Similar to 6x15, the producers seem to have drawn on a genuinely fannish genre to produce an episode that exhibits large structural similarities to the fanauthors' transformative fiction, employing the rich archive of *SPN*'s stories to have fans participate in the meta-text. Overtly established as a fanauthor in 5x01, Becky turns into a Mary Sue who inserts herself into the brothers' lives in 7x08, bringing a distinctly fannish character into the show's text. Her blatant Mary-Sue-ness is only somewhat mitigated because Becky considers herself a "loser," both in "school" and in "life," and is initially also perceived as such by others as her brief stopover at her ten-year high school reunion illustrates, where the class president first does not recognize her and then makes the connection only through her previous nickname, "Yechie Becky." Nevertheless, the fact that her standing with her old classmate improves considerably when she introduces her husband Sam supports reading even this portrayal as an allusion to Mary Sue stories, since some of them present a clear 'before,' when the later Mary Sue is still a "loser" character caught up in an unspectacular life, and a distinct 'after,' when she transforms into the Mary Sue that is "impossible to miss" since she is "more charming, more belligerent, more understanding, more beautiful, more graceful, more eccentric, more spiritual […] than anyone else" (Pflieger)—and has a better, nicer, and handsomer husband than anyone else.

Apart, however, from being at first situated as a rather "pathetic" (melanyrose; also cf. Blackmantra53) character, who exists unnoticed and unloved and constructs her whole identity on being a fan since the online *Supernatural* "message boards" are "the only place [where] people underst[an]d" her, Becky fully conforms to a stereotypical Mary Sue. So follows 7x08 characteristic examples of Mary Sue stories on the level of its plot, which, for instance, has Becky (re)appear in the Winchesters' world quasi out of the blue: Sam, who has left Dean for a brief "granola-munching hike in the desert," simply comes back "four days" later to present him with Becky, who he is about to marry. His futile attempt at explaining his imminent wedding, consisting of, "we met, we ate and—and talked and fell in love," mirrors the fact that Mary Sue often "needs no explanation" (Pflieger) for her

presence—she simply shows up. Echoing that Mary Sues nearly always enter a romantic relationship with one of the protagonists of the meta-text (cf. Smith; Pflieger), she has already drugged Sam with a "love potion" to make him "f[a]ll in love" with her. Moreover, Becky does not stop at marrying him but also turns into the Mary Sue-type "center of [his] universe" (Pflieger) as she claims Sam for herself only by taking away his free will with her concoction: Under the influence, Sam considers Dean less than "supportive" of their union, which makes him leave his brother for his wife as they "go up to her place in Delaware"; and although the show's entire text has over the years established them as inherently "codependent upon each other" (5x18), Sam later even tells Dean, "I don't need you anymore."[184] Similar to the stories of the Mary Sue genre, Becky has thus replaced the most important person in another character's life with herself, wedging herself between the brothers to be the one Sam is closest to.

Even when Becky finally realizes that she is "better" than keeping Sam drugged for the rest of his life, she continues being a Mary Sue: Instead of simply letting Sam go free, she devises a plan to force the demon to cancel all similar deals he has made in the town and then to deliver him to Crowley, the King of Hell, who intends to "[m]ake an example of him" by punishing him severely. In the end, she even saves Sam's life when she stabs the demon who is slowly choking Sam to death—as the demon has also been made to abandon taking other people's souls, Becky has, in true Mary Sue-fashion "saved everyone from everything" (Pflieger).[185] Although she ultimately has to annul her marriage to Sam instead of dying as a true Mary Sue would cap it all off, it becomes evident that the plot of "Season Seven, Time for a Wedding" is structured in analogy to prototypical Mary Sue stories, integrating many of their principal elements to enable reading the episode like a direct translation of the genre to the screen. In similarity to 6x15, the producers again seem to have drawn on the fans' own productivity to have them participate in the meta-text, employing fanfiction as a blueprint for another episode that uses the fanauthors' stories on a structural level.

[184] Conversely, when Sam comes out of his drugged state, his first reaction is, "I'm calling Dean," which reinforces that only Becky's potion could make the brothers go separate ways.

[185] Even without reading this second segment of the episode as a Mary Sue story, Becky clearly shows agency in these scenes, which allows even non-fanauthors to see the participation and power of fans within the meta-text. After all, despite being a fan inexperienced in exorcising demons, she does not "run" like Sam wants her to, but instead kills the demon to save Sam.

Furthermore, many of the details interspersed throughout the episode decidedly support a reading of 7x08 as incorporating fanfiction into the meta-text, affirming the efficacy of the fanauthors' textual strategies that indicate the particular significance of Mary Sue stories in their claims to agency and participation. In this manner, even details and lines mentioned in passing assert the power of the fanwriters, who thus recognize their share in the meta-text. So does the demon, for instance, not only give Becky the "love potion" she wants to have but also makes deals with other people so that their biggest "dreams are coming true": Someone wins the lottery, someone else gets promoted to the position of CEO; for Becky, however, Sam is "her dream," and the fact that the episode's first segment shows her "living out her greatest fantasy" (melanyrose) corresponds to the notion that Mary Sue stories put into writing that many fanauthors "want nothing more in life" (Illavyn412) than to be with their favorite characters. In an additional *shout out*, Becky also receives in the end the positive affirmation Mary Sues are used to in fanfiction: Overcoming her initially negative portrayal as a "loser," she has not only taken action herself but Sam also repositions her as a "good person," appreciating that she has not given in to selfish desires but acted altruistically to release him and save other people's forfeited souls. His positive reading of her character thus reverses the negative identification she has met with from her classmate at her high school reunion, and as such eliminates all traces of a non-Mary Sue character since she is now virtually "beloved of everyone who meets her" (Pflieger; cf. Smith)—even of Sam whom she has "roofied."

Despite some fans' negative reactions to the episode, 7x08 ultimately affirms the fanauthors' agency and their participation in the meta-text. Recognizing that Becky is "so much like so many of us," Blackmantra53 does not see the episode's "extreme date rapiness" others complained about (Trivet; also cf. orionlion) but alternatively focuses on the attention to fandom the producers demonstrate.[186] While Becky's behavior in 7x08 certainly does not always shine a positive light on fandom, she is vindicated, on the one hand, through her actions in the second segment of the episode, and, on the other, through

[186] Some fans also think that Becky in this episode is rather not "so much like so many of us" (or at least like characters in the fans' stories) but instead believe that she was specifically "patterned on that crazy woman who claims to be married to Jensen and also claims to be her own daughter and married to Jared" (Zazreil; also cf. shang yiet). With "crazy woman," Zazreil refers to Stephanie Ware, the name/pseudonym of a 'fan' who has repeatedly maintained that she is Ackles's wife and the mother of his children. In addition, she has been harassing Ackles's real wife Danneell Ackles (née Harris) on *Twitter* and also maintains that her daughter Bianca recently married Padalecki. For more information on her, cf., for example, "Stephanie Ware."

the Mary Sue pattern her story follows: In order to make 7x08 "a Mary Sue fic brought to life" (Trivet), she needs to be a Mary Sue—a "caricature of a fangirl" (Katiki) who goes to extremes to transform the fictional universe according to her wants and purposes. Along with 4x18, 5x01, 5x09, and similar to 6x15, "Season Seven, Time for a Wedding" therefore makes space for fanfiction in the meta-text, "transplant[s]" it "to the screen" (Mia Nina), and asserts in this way that the "writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved on some level in collectively creating the world of the show" (CordeliaGray). More than other shows, *Supernatural* draws on both fanwriters and the archive of their fanfiction to create the meta-text, which in the end makes its production less of a hegemonial and one-sided process but increasingly participatory and as such increasingly democratic.

As these episodes illustrate, power relations—and in particular their revolution through fans—constitute one of the major themes that pervade the meta-text of *Supernatural*: Fannishness and fannish agency loom large in *SPN*, and the creative team willingly demonstrates the fans' essential contribution to the show's text and production. So does *SPN*, for instance, introduce another fan character in 7x20 "The Girl with the Dungeons and Dragons Tattoo," with Charlie Bradbury[187] becoming a recurring character (8x11; 8x20; 9x04; 10x11; 10x18; 10x21 who would present fandom from a very different angle than Becky or Demian and Barnes. Played by Felicia Day, Charlie is quickly established as a fangirl of the truest kind: 7x20 abounds with references to her fandoms of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, to just name a few; she is a gamer, and, as later episodes show, *LARP*s and has been a long-time fan of *The Hobbit* and fantasy in general. Unlike Becky, for instance, Charlie is not focused on one fandom and does not know the *Supernatural* books; as a lesbian, she has no sexual interest in the Winchesters whatsoever.

Already "The Girl with the Dungeons and Dragons Tattoo" institutes her as a character who is very much self-reliant, knows to help herself (and others), is altruistic and courageous—in short, she has power and agency; or, as John Kubicek writes in a review of the episode, she is "kind of perfect." With her hacking skills as an IT expert, she proves instrumental in enabling Sam and Dean to inflict a significant defeat on the

[187] Charlie Bradbury is one of the character's pseudonyms, albeit the one the Winchesters first get to know her under and which they (and fandom) use when referring to her—even after her real name, Celeste Middleton, is revealed in 10x11 "There's No Place Like Home."

leviathans, their arch-enemies in season seven; when she leaves them at the end of the episode, Dean affectionately tells her that she is "kind of like the little sister I never wanted," affirming that she is now part of the family, has a share in the close bond between the brothers, and is virtually incorporated in the show' small circle of protagonists. Clearly, Charlie has agency within the meta-text, which the show reasserts again in episode 7x23 "Survival of the Fittest," when the Winchesters depend on the computer skills she has taught them to locate and eliminate the leviathans' leader, prompting Sam after their successful hunt to acknowledge their dependency on her and to declare, "Thank you, Charlie, wherever you are."

A major part of the Winchesters' universe, Charlie then reappears in 8x11 "LARP and the Real Girl," an episode that ultimately validates the power of fans and the increased agency and participation they have within the meta-text. Airing on 23 January 2013, 8x11 fully reverses the relation between fans and the show's protagonists as Charlie is the one who in the end rescues the "damse[l] in distress," breaks the magic spell binding a fairy to do evil, and delivers a malevolent sorcerer to a tribunal for punishment. As the episode clearly spells out, she is the "queen" and Dean is her "handmaiden," whose task as her servant it is to "tend to the queen's laundry and chamber pots"—in "LARP and the Real Girl," Charlie is queen of "Moondoor," a *LARP*ing game that has "[f]our kingdoms, Followers of the Moon, Elves, Warriors of Yesteryear, and the dreaded Shadow Orcs," and whose "biannual Battle of Kingdoms" for the overall king-/queenship of "Moondoor" is about to be staged. When two players are killed in an apparently supernatural fashion, Sam and Dean arrive in town to investigate; quickly learning that they "know the queen," they head to the game-site, where they are invited to "join the Army of Moons," since the "queen is always on the lookout for new squires." The brothers agree for the sake of their investigation, only to realize that they are lost in the universe of "Moondoor": Charlie is not only in command of the "[f]our kingdoms" but also takes command of the search for the killer, making Dean her servant and relegating Sam to do some online research; when she finally discovers that the *LARP*er Boltar the Furious, who has made a fairy do his every bidding, is behind the killings, she saves everyone—the fairy Gilda, Sam and Dean, and the other *LARP*ers—while the Winchesters are hardly more than mere bystanders. In the end, the "Battle of Kingdoms" can take place, with the brothers fighting in Charlie's army to secure her queenship for two more years.

In apparent analogy to 5x09, this episode constructs fannish agency via its plot that has the Winchesters remain rather passive: Rather than them, Charlie is the "hero" of the day, saving people from being killed by stopping the evil sorcerer just like Demian and Barnes vanquish the ghosts haunting the convention hotel. Nevertheless, 5x09 and 8x11 conceptualize the position of fans in a decidedly different way, which illustrates the steadily increasing power of fandom in *Supernatural* in the roughly three years that have passed between the episodes. While "The Real Ghostbusters" depicts a story of fannish empowerment, with Demian and Barnes moving from overweight, "freakin' annoying" fans to the ones who, as Dean says, "saved our asses" (5x09), "LARP and the Real Girl" markedly distinguishes itself from this earlier representation by quasi showing the results of the process 5x09 initiated: 8x11 situates Charlie as being in power from the very beginning to present fannish agency not as something that has to be obtained but that is—at least from season eight in 2013 onwards—a given. Not only have previous episodes clearly established Charlie's agency, her knowledge, and her equality to the Winchesters, but 8x11 affirms this position in several instances throughout the entire episode, removing all doubts as to her status as a clearly powerful agent: So has the first scene she appears in in "LARP and the Real Girl" triumph her in a mock-swordfight with a knight to the applause of an audience celebrating their queen; then, when Sam and Dean want to talk to her, they need to enter the royal tent, i.e. enter her own space that underscores her queenship via its furniture and decorations and automatically positions the brothers as petitioners; when they seek information, they have to approach her—she is the one who recognizes a possible lead and knows the game and its players, i.e. she is the expert whose knowledge makes Sam admit to Dean in an affirmation of the significance of fans that, "Charlie knows Moondoor a lot better than we do. We need her"; and, finally, when the brothers want her to leave the game-site to get her out of danger, she asserts that "the queen—she has to stay. […] People are dying. This can't happen on my watch. […] I'm gonna stay and fight for it."

Reasserting the agency she showed in 7x20, Charlie clearly takes the lead in the following events, telling Dean, for instance, that he has "to ditch the suit if you're gonna walk and talk with the queen": She transforms him from an albeit fake FBI agent into her "handmaiden,"[188] emphasizing her superior position in the power structure of

[188] While this scene that has Charlie put Dean in a submissive position not only supports a reading of 8x11 as a statement of fannish power but also in regard to women's rights—and possibly also in regard to

"Moondoor," which others readily confirm by addressing her with "my queen" or "your majesty" while disregarding her "handmaiden" walking next to her or even putting him into place by admonishing him to "speak [only] when spoken to." The further course of the episode then shows Dean and Sam making rather futile plans for catching the murderer while Charlie takes things into her own hands: Even when she is abducted and ostensibly at the mercy of Boltar the Furious, she stays in power, telling Boltar's fairy Gilda that she is the "hero" Gilda called for, because "my name is Charlie Bradbury, and I am here to rescue you." Accordingly, not even the later arrival of Sam and Dean, whom Boltar considers more dangerous in some sort of masculine bias, can diminish her agency, since it is Charlie who ends the ensuing fight between the three with releasing Gilda from her bond—overtly, she asserts afterwards that, "I'm the one who saves damsels in distress around here." The ending of the episode then only serves to highlight the permanence of Charlie's position as an active and powerful queen: Albeit in the frame of the game, the Winchesters do battle for her, virtually acknowledging that they are willing to give their lives for her and the continuity of her queenship: Fannish power is not questioned; the episode does not doubt her standing.

Ultimately, the plot and characterizations of "LARP and the Real Girl" thus read like a prolonged demonstration of fannish agency: Charlie is in command, she basically replaces Sam and Dean, and shows to be as self-confident so as to tell them to "let [her] know," if she can "ever be of help" again. Not only a "hero" in "Moondoor," the fangirl Charlie, as Dean assures her, therefore also proves to be a "hero" in "the real world"—as the title of the episode has it, she is a "Real Girl." Moreover, Charlie continues to fulfill this role of a powerful agent in all subsequent episodes she appears until her heroic and self-sacrificing death in 10x21 "Dark Dynasty": So does she replace Sam as Dean's

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the rights of homosexuals, considering Charlie's lesbian identity—, his transformation into her "handmaiden" complicates this issue considerably: Although she could just as well have made him her squire or even her knight to preserve his male identity, she strips him of his masculinity and feminizes him, which has a woman—and a queen, at that—equate having a female identity with being inferior. Nevertheless, the fact that Dean keeps a sword, even in his identity as a "handmaiden," demonstrates that he does not adhere to being feminized all the while he is clearly submissive to Charlie—he seems to accept his position as having less power than the queen/the fan but does not uphold the possible implication of female inferiority.

The gender politics in this scene become even more complex through the fact that *Supernatural* has long been criticized—in particular by its fans—for its rather negligible number of woman characters, who are often either demonic/evil or die soon. Even Collins recently called the show "in small ways […] gratuitously misogynistic," even to the extent of making him "cringe sometimes" (qtd. in Dibdin), which mirrors the fans' assessment of calling women the "underrated, underestimated and often forgotten characters of Supernatural" ("Women of Supernatural").

hunting partner in 8.20 "Pac-Man Fever" and helps the elder Winchester in the course of the episode to kill a dangerous djinn, with the result that in the end they invite her to "come back" any time. Afterwards definitely an integral part of the brothers' limited social circle and acknowledged as valuable support, she does soon "come back" in 9x04 "Slumber Party"—an episode that not only establishes Charlie as one of the Winchesters' kind and literally equal to them since she has taken up "hunting" and has already eliminated "a teenage vampire and a ghost," but furthermore also illustrates the role fannish practices have in *Supernatural* since it builds upon the popular story of *The Wizard of Oz*[189] in the very fashion in which fanauthors transform *SPN* itself. With multiple of Baum's characters such as Dorothy and the Wicked Witch of the West appearing in the Winchesters' temporary hide-out in Kansas, of all places, Zubernis and Larsen rightly conclude that 9x04 "blurred the lines between Show and fandom in a unique way—the episode was essentially Wizard of Oz fanfiction! It was literally a 'transformative work' in every definition of the word" ("*Supernatural* 9x04").

As "Wizard of Oz fanfiction" that gives Charlie a central function in its plot, 9x04, which aired 29 October 2013, therefore fulfills a double role in affirming the importance of fans and fannish practices within the meta-text of *Supernatural*. To begin with, Charlie reasserts that she is instrumental within the show's fictional universe and has powerful agency, since the episode does not only position her side by side with the Winchesters, supplying them, for instance, with the "poppy bullets" that "will stun the crap out of" the Wicked Witch, but twice shows her as indispensable to both the show and its world: First, she gives her life for Dean when the Wicked Witch attempts to kill him, throwing herself into a lightning bolt aimed at him; and secondly, after the angel Ezekiel has resurrected her, she kills the Wicked Witch with one of Dorothy's ruby high heels right before the witch can bring her army of flying monkeys out of Oz to subjugate the world of the Winchesters. In this way, Charlie saves the show's protagonist and its fictional universe, once again confirming her position as a self-reliant and powerful agent. The fact that the episode ends with her following Dorothy to Oz, where they "have a rebellion to finish" amidst "all kinds of danger" such as "flying monkeys [and] armies of witches," indicates not only that she is ready for her own "adventure" independent of the brothers but also to

[189] *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is a 1900 novel by L. Frank Baum, which has become the quintessential American fairy tale and part of the national identity of the United States under the abbreviated name of *The Wizard of Oz*, the title of a popular 1902 Broadway musical and the famous 1939 movie starring Judy Garland (cf., for example, Nathanson 1-20).

what great extent 9x04 subscribes to the mechanics of fanfiction writing: Charlie enters the doubly-fictional universe of Oz very much like fanfiction has *OCs*, that is, the fanauthor's own characters, enter the meta-text's fictional universe. Together with the entire episode transforming the ('meta-textual') story of *The Wizard of Oz* to have Dorothy and the Wicked Witch leave Oz for the Winchesters' world, to provide Dorothy with an almost familial connection to the brothers, and to show the allegedly true story behind its "silly books,"[190] this makes "Slumber Party" a "work [of fanfiction] that adds new meaning and messages to another person's story" (Zubernis and Larsen, "*Supernatural* 9x04") and a work that enlarges the archive of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Ultimately, "Slumber Party" thus demonstrates fannish participation in the meta-text, highlighting the show's integration of fans and their practices into its production processes through transforming another meta-text in true fanfiction fashion. Stretching from 7x20 until 10x21—which has her die after first acquiring and then protecting the *Book of the Damned*, i.e. the book containing the spell to free Dean from turning evil,—Charlie's story-arc situates fans as an integral part of the meta-text, as powerful agents involved in the shaping of the Winchesters' fictional universe, as the saviors of the meta-text and its world, and as active partners who work hand in hand with both protagonists and producers. Together with previous episodes that illustrate that the fannish strategies of claiming power can be considered effective, the episodes featuring Charlie support a reading of *Supernatural* as exceptionally aware and integrative of fandom and fanfiction,

[190] "Slumber Party" abounds with examples that transform Baum's novel to make it "essentially Wizard of Oz fanfiction" (Zubernis and Larsen, "*Supernatural* 9x04"): Apart from integrating *Wizard of Oz* characters Dorothy and the Wicked Witch into its plot, 9x04, for instance, positions Dorothy's "dad […] L. Frank Baum, the writer," as a "Man of Letters," i.e. as a member of a secret organization of hunters of the supernatural the Winchesters also belong to. Likewise, 9x04 states that the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion were once human "freedom fighters" in the *SPN* universe, only to be turned into their *Wizard of Oz* characters by the Wicked Witch to prevent them from protecting Dorothy.

What is more, "Slumber Party" does not only provide many instances of similar transformations of *The Wizard of Oz* but also conforms to the fannish practice of using fanfiction to "reveal the true story" (Annabel Fate Juliet Gaisras) of the meta-text: In the episode, Dorothy pronounces the *Wizard of Oz* novel to be "[r]evisionist history" which changes "real life" and the "truth," i.e. *SPN*'s "much bloodier" story of its events, into "silly books" that seek to "undo what [really] happened"—in true fanfiction manner, 9x04 is therefore conceptualized as uncovering the truth while it situates the 'meta-text' as "silly."

Furthermore, "Slumber Party" also includes a dialogue between Sam and Dorothy, in which both characters comment on the practice of "having a series of books written about you," with Dorothy declaring it "odd" when Sam presents her with a copy of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. While Sam affirms that he knows the feeling thanks to the *Supernatural* books and thinks that "it is definitely weird," he also slips into the role of a fanauthor since, after all, he is currently transforming the story of Oz, and thus acknowledges that at the "[e]nd of the day, it's our story, so we get to write it."

making space for fannishness within its text as an acknowledgement of the power and agency of fans. As my analysis has shown, fanfiction in particular seems to be a practice of the show's transformative fandom that the producers devote great attention to, incorporating it prominently in the plot of many episodes and creating others in structural analogy to stories and story genres. Apart from the specific episodes studied here, fanauthors have accordingly discovered references and correlations to their writing in numerous other episodes so as to have given rise to the fanspeak term of *Kripke'd*, which allows fandom to put a label on fanfiction's influence on the meta-text: "To be 'Kripked' means to have events in fic or Fanon […] *validated* by new canon" ("Kripked")—the fan-text was first and the episode that uses it was second.

Referencing *Supernatural*'s creator and long-time executive producer Eric Kripke, *Kripke'd* gives expression to the "frequency with which SPN canon confirms SPN fanon" ("Kripked"), i.e. to the many occurrences when fans watch the show and "th[ink]—hey, that's just like that fic I read" (missyjack, "Ever"). Indicative of the attention the creators pay to fannish writing, the term was already coined in October 2006, just after the first episodes of season two had aired, when fans first began to notice that "Eric seem[s] to ~~plunder our livejournals~~ see into our hearts and fulfil our fannish desires" (missyjack, "Ever"). Not only does missyjack recognize here that Kripke and the other showrunners are intimately aware of "fannish desires," but she also highlights the close correlation between fanfiction and what later appears in the meta-text, establishing a causal link between fannish tropes/genres and episodes that give the distinct impression of being based on stories Kripke has previously read in the fanfiction archives. The graphic feature of crossing out parts of her statement, which prevents construing her words as possibly accusing Kripke of committing plagiarism,[191] only serves to underline the assumption prevalent among fanauthors that many *SPN* episodes directly build on fanfiction—an assumption which is underpinned by the fact that Kripke has made known that he "pop[s]

[191] Plagiarizing fanfiction was in fact an accusation a fan directed at author Marion Zimmer Bradley (*The Mists of Avalon*; *Darkover*-series), who had before this 1991/1992 case worked "harmoniously" with fanauthors for over two decades to create for her meta-texts a "real shared universe" in "true collaboration" (Coker 89). As was "custom among fans at the time" (Coker 90), a fanauthor by the name of Jane Lamb sent Bradley a copy of the fanzine *Moon Phases* 12 with her story *Masks*, only to accuse Bradley of plagiarizing it when Bradley later announced the publication of *Contraband*, which was supposed to be her next novel in the *Darkover*-universe. Although Bradley offered acknowledging Lamb and a compensation of $500, Lamb threatened to sue so that in consequence Bradley's "publisher dropped Bradley's contract for the book, and the novel was not published" (Coker 90), prompting Bradley to terminate all cooperation with fanauthors. For further information, cf. Coker 89-90; "Marion Zimmer Bradley Fanfiction Controversy."

around the various Live Journal stuff" and is "on as many fan boards as everyone else" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 178). While coined in formal analogy to *Jossed*, a term from the *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* fandom that indicates that its creator Joss Whedon tends to inadvertently contradict fanfiction with the show's episodes, *Kripke'd* thus expresses the very reverse: "If getting Jossed is getting your fanon disproved getting Kripked is getting your fanon proved," writes, for instance, mikhale as quoted on clex_monkie89's *LiveJournal* page, reinforcing that fanfiction appears to have significant influence on *Supernatural*'s episodes.

Adding that, "we write it and then Kripke verifies it," mikhale voices a prominent statement fans make in regard to many episodes, when they profess in their reviews to be "90% sure that I read a lot of that in a fanfic last week" (Gwonk, 9:02 p.m.) or when they conclude that "[f]anfic has been Kripke'd once again" (andreth47, "5-1") in response to an episode showing that a "commonly recurring [fannish] theory […] seems to have made its way to a canonical incarnation" (Klimchynskaya). To substantiate that these parallels are in fact far from infrequent or mere coincidence, missyjack has created an elaborate chart of fannish themes, tropes, and genres which "occurred in a number of SPN fanfics *before* they occurred on the Show," revealing that even such rather outlandish tropes of fanfiction as "Wing!fic," "sex pollen" or "devirginisation" appeared in the meta-text *after* fanauthors had introduced them to the *Supernatural* universe ("Ever"). Pointing out 24 inherently fannish subjects, she lists on her "Eric Kripke's SUPERNATURAL Fanfic Bingo" the fanfiction origin of, for instance, the "Lost Winchester brother," who appeared in the form of Adam in 4x19 "Jump the Shark," or the "Cross Dressing" reference Dean makes in 5x04 "The End," when he admits that he "kind of liked" wearing his former girlfriend's "pink" and "satiny" underwear. Noting when the topics or genres first appeared in fanfiction and in which form and in which episodes they later featured in the meta-text, missyjack emphatically concludes that frequently "we did it first" and that Kripke only "followed suit."

Highlighting the sequence of fanfiction coming "first" and the meta-text "follow[ing] suit," the term *Kripke'd* thus reinforces the intimate and unique relationship between *SPN*'s fans and *SPN*'s creators that rests on the latter approving, supporting, and integrating fanfiction—in short, on writing episodes in which fanfiction is *Kripke'd* and that thus emphasize the producers' attention to fans and the participation of fans. Although the question remains open how much of this needs to be ascribed to the commercial

viability of fans, *Supernatural* altogether seems to demonstrate in various ways that its fanauthors have left their status as consumers and have not been invited to tele-participate along approved channels (cf. Ross); instead, analyzing the show suggests that they have in fact acquired a share in the meta-text, which therefore increasingly comes across as the "in-text version of fandom" (Sivarajan). From little details such as a barely legible line on a typewriter in Dean's room that reads "Missing Cas" (8x14) in response to the fanfiction genre of *Destiel* and fannish complaints about too infrequent appearances by Collins to fan-heavy and fanfiction-heavy episodes like 4x18, 5x01, 5x09, 6x15, 7x08, 8x11, or 9x04 the show acknowledges the power of fans: Notwithstanding any ulterior motives, commercial or otherwise, it cannot be denied that *Supernatural* recogizes their agency through representing them, their preferences, and above all, their writing in the meta-text. Starting with its first season, *Supernatural* has made space for fanauthors and fanfiction, first referencing Wincest, then giving the show—in form of its own novels—a fandom, fanauthors, (Wincest) fanfiction, and fan conventions, all the while portraying fans as inherently powerful: Their fannishness has made them agents in the meta-text, either in stories of empowerment or in stories that have them in power; they carry important messages, solve cases, eliminate ghosts and sorcerers, save the Winchesters and numerous others; they marry the brothers and become part of their extended family. Moreover, the genre of fanfiction itself has become a blueprint for episodes, with the producers creating plots which are in content, structure, and details virtually analogous to RPF, Mary Sue, and AU stories or which are just as transformative of another text as fanfiction is of the meta-text of *Supernatural*.

In the end, *Supernatural* seems to be in its entirety what Trivet says about 7x08, i.e. "fic brought to life"—seems to be fanfiction 'transplanted to the screen' (Mia Nina). Ostensibly, the fans' transformative works have brought about a revolution in the production process of the show that gives them more power and an active role in creating and shaping the meta-text. They have become so important as a group of (often well-funded and free-spending) viewers that, instead of being subjected to developments beyond their control and constrained by "invitational strategies" à la Ross, they have managed to acquire agency: As *SPN*'s meta-text shows, their writing enables them to alter what they watch on their screens and allows them—as fanauthors, as simpatico, as Becky, as Demian and Barnes, and in the character of Charlie—to participate in their object of fandom. In the long run, *Supernatural* accordingly reveals that the showrunners have

invested considerable time and effort to become familiar with fandom since Wincest episodes, Mary Sue episodes, or episodes that have *Kripke'd* stories demonstrate their understanding of fanfiction, its conventions, its language, and its archive. Even more so, the meta-text thus seems to validate that the strategies the fanwriters employ in their writing are effective—are successful in forcing the producers to accept the powerful fanauthor, to bow to an active and vocal community, and to recognize the claim to power fans articulate with their disclaimers, Mary Sues, and RPF. In short, the meta-text of *Supernatural* corroborates that fannish "storytelling […] is the true flower of free will. […] When you create stories, you become gods" (8x21).

Giving space to the new 'author-gods' of fanwriters, *Supernatural*'s showrunners therefore do not only know that "[t]here's actually fans," as Dean says in 4x18, but display that they "really know, understand and most importantly appreciate fandom" (Eden Winchester): They are themselves "huge fan[s] of fanfiction" (McG qtd. in Bekakos) and accordingly acknowledge in their episodes that the "writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved on some level in collectively creating the world of the show" (CordeliaGray). The meta-text, as this analysis has shown, illustrates the "privileged relationship" (Felschow) that fans and producers have created—in *Supernatural*, the interaction between the two parties "bespeaks a commitment to communication" (M. Gray) that leaves fans more influential than ever before as it democratizes the production process by listening to them, involving them, and sharing power with them. Connecting the show's writers and fanwriters, their dialogue yields fanfiction that reflects the meta-text and a meta-text that reflects fanfiction in mutual recognition and codependence: *Together*, the creative team of producers and fans enlarges the *SPN* archive. In this way, *Supernatural* itself clearly answers the questions it posits to its fans in 9x18 "Meta Fiction," when Metatron, the Scribe of God, turns to face the audience and asks, "What makes a story work? Is it the plot, the character, the text? The subtext? And who gives a story meaning? Is it the writer? Or you?"

4.3 The Creative Team and the Fans: An Ongoing Dialogue

> "First of all, I love our fans. I love them to death. I love how passionate they are. […] We are so conscious and aware of our fans. We're making the show for the fans; we're not making the show for the network. We would never do anything to betray them. I'm not saying we're perfect. I'm not saying we don't make mistakes. But we're very conscious and aware. And when we *do* make mistakes, we course-correct."
>
> Kripke, Interview.

> "Kripke and everyone is paying attention. Fans do have a direct effect on the show, this show follows what you do. […] It's so participatory and interactive […]. If they don't like the character I'm playing, if it's a hindrance to the show and the producers know, then I might lose a job, but that's a good thing. […] Actors are just part of the process."
>
> Speight, qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196.

> "This was the first time I saw a TV fan base as we are all 'us'. There are different roles within that 'us' but (*Supernatural* has) really perfected and honored the art of the audience being integral to the art. Nobody is a brilliant actor in their shower. They might think they are but communication is a two way process […] And it's really easy for an actor to start thinking it really is all about them, when in fact, we are the servants. […] So this is a really great symbiotic relationship and communal creation of a show. So I think that's also why it's such a passionate fan base. Because people understand that they're being honored as part of the process and not just passive observers."
>
> Rhodes, qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 197.

"[C]ommunication is a two way process," affirms actress Kim Rhodes, putting in a nutshell what executive producer Eric Kripke and actor Richard Speight Jr. assert when they, respectively, acknowledge that they "course-correct" when fans complain about their "mistakes" or that "[f]ans do have direct effect on the show" because it is "so participatory and interactive." Foregrounding the "symbiotic relationship" between *Supernatural*'s fans and producers, who engage in a "communal creation" of the show that positions its fandom as "part of the process," all three voices give testimony to the dialogue the creative team and the fanbase engage in—one that ostensibly seems to consist of real exchange instead of mere lip service, since the showrunners repeatedly profess and by their actions prove to be more than "just passive observers." Altogether, writes M. Gray,

their interaction both online and offline "bespeaks a commitment to communication and the presence of a love relationship on both sides" that makes the bond between *SPN*'s creators and its fanbase "deeper and more extensive than most similar relationships"—so deep and so extensive so as to lead Schmidt to pronounce the relations between them an "actual," if not even a "*codependent*" relationship that my analysis distinctly shows to rest on two empowered participants who listen and react to each other.

Codependence and reciprocity are thus key concepts that dominate the communication between fanauthors and showrunners in the fandom of *Supernatural*: While much of fannish interaction with the creative teams of other shows, the producers of movies, or the authors of books remains either one-sided (cf. Bates; Stead)—and thus not much of an interaction at all—or can be characterized as largely reactive, i.e. the fans react to what they read or watch in the meta-text or to what they are being told in interviews, official chats, or similar authorized paratexts (cf. Ross 41, 218-64; Gray, *Show*), the interaction of *SPN*'s fans with the creators of the show distinguishes itself by mutual recognition and acknowledgement: Both sides react to each other and interact with each other, so that it is not only developments in the meta-text or its official paratexts that find their way into the show's fanfiction as in so many other fandoms but "developments in online fan communities […] find their way into the text of the series itself" (Stein, "#Bowdown" 415). So do not only Kripke, Rhodes, or Speight confirm that, in the latter's words, "[f]ans do have a direct effect on the show," but other members of the creative team echo their statements as when Ackles, for instance, acknowledges that he was "not sure" whether in the past "fanfavorite021 from Germany really had a voice about whether the storyline went a certain way, but it seems to me that now they do. They're getting paid attention to by the people creating the show" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 178).

Fans, as Ackles asserts, have a "voice" in *Supernatural*—they engage in a dialogue with the producers that extends over a number of media spaces and makes use of many channels to ensure that they are being heard and listened to. While fanfiction is arguably one of the most significant forms of communication that conveys fannish desires and preferences to the producers—and one, at that, which Kripke and others "love" and particularly "welcome" (qtd. in Larsen and Zubernis and *Fangasm* 143) since it "is a wonderful art form" through which the "fans speak" (McG qtd. in Bekakos)—, the interaction between the show's fanbase and its creators is certainly not restricted to their transformative works. As the preceding subchapter has focused on the showrunners'

reaction to the fanauthors' online writing, i.e. their active perpetuation of the dialogue by incorporating the show's fanfiction with its tropes and genres into the meta-text, this part is now meant to complement my previous analysis by focusing on the other elements of their interaction, most of which are non-fanfiction-based, in order to provide a comprehensive study of the dialogic nature of *Supernatural*. To do so, I look at the entire feedback loop the creators and the fans are committed to upholding, beginning with episodes which engender a reaction from fandom, to the reaction of producers who react to fannish reaction to episodes, to the response of fans who in turn respond to the response of the producers. Based on trends in fanfiction but mostly on interviews, episode reviews, fannish discussion online, convention statements, and similar non-transformative means of communication,[192] this study thus intends to support my findings discussed in the previous section, positioning *Supernatural* as a show likely to be indicative of a new form of TV making through its participatory set-up, its involvement of fans, its space for various voices—in short, through its more democratic production process that sets it apart from other meta-texts by emphasizing true dialogue in all venues.

Willingness to engage with the other party's textual output characterizes the entire dialogue that surrounds *Supernatural*, both on part of the fans and, as yet more remarkably in today's media, on part of the producers. Analyzing their interaction—i.e. their actions and subsequent reactions that constitute the show's dialogic and participatory nature in the first place—results in a five-step process, or, rather, a circle of five segments, of which I posit the latter two to be what makes *SPN* "unique" (Cohen qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196) and what provides the basis for Rhodes's assessment of the show as "we are all 'us.'" While, in contrast, the first two steps that initiate the dialogue are common to all transformative fandoms, since these are virtually defined by the fact that fans react to, one, the publication of a meta-text with, two, fannish activities in the form of discussions, fan art, or fanfiction that expands its archive, the specifically "participatory and interactive" nature of *SPN* Speight stresses already originates in the following third step: Even though a number of fandoms develop a visible and vocal Internet presence, by no means all of them do, and *Supernatural*'s fanbase scholars acknowledge to be particularly insistent,

[192] While this subchapter does not center on fanfiction, I nevertheless deem a comprehensive analysis that includes more than the fanauthors' transformative works to be indispensable in regard to my case study. After all, it is not only the dialogue in fanfiction that makes *Supernatural* a "communal creation" and its fans "integral to the art," as Rhodes says, but other means of interaction exist side by side with it and need to be mentioned to avoid a one-sided and insufficient representation of the show and its communication with its fandom.

and outspoken. The fans "loudly demand to be heard," writes Felschow of *SPN*'s "incredibly vocal fandom"; they "voice their preferences in a loud and organized fashion" so as to make the show's fandom "stronger than most" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 208)—an assessment that actors on the show such as Chad Lindberg share, who attributes his return to *SPN* in season five after his storyline first ended in 2x21 to the power of the fans:

> This particular fan base is, I think pretty strong. They have the power to shut down Twitter. I've seen write-ups about them in magazines as being a pretty unique and strong fan base. It's pretty awesome. Fans will get together and make it happen […] I saw an opportunity with Twitter because every week the *Supernatural* fans were taking on Twitter with something, right? […] I jumped in there with them and I just said "let's get me back on the show." And they were fighting for it and then there was a petition started with 1500 signatures! The fans are what's truly holding the show up in a lot of ways, so of course they would have a lot of power. (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 208)

"[L]oudly" (Felschow), fans thus fight for what they want, and since "Kripke and everyone is paying attention," as Speight affirms, they "do have a direct effect on the show"—or, in Lindberg's words, they "make it happen." Getting the actor "'back on the show'" substantiates that fans have "a lot of power"; as the case validates, their active and multi-voiced Internet presence provides the basis for establishing a dialogue, since it is the fact that their community is so "strong" which compels the producers to listen (cf. chapter 3.3.1): Instead of keeping quiet, the fans engage in conversation with the showrunners to make their opinions known, to enforce their preferences, and to actively influence the meta-text—*SPN*'s many fans constitute a force the producers need to acknowledge, since "especially in a world of commercialized entertainment, audiences will have some measure of power over creators of entertainment" (Felschow).[193]

Although the formation of vocal communities is not at all unique to *Supernatural* fanauthors, it is nevertheless something that already sets them apart from many other fandoms. While in some cases, as Ross concludes, commercial reasoning has in fact resulted in acknowledging the presence of an Internet-savvy audience/fanbase and thus in "an increasing sense among viewers that they *can*, in fact, be heard" (66) so that ultimately the "figure of the *listening* producing team [has become] important to the

[193] In cases of meta-texts more popular than *Supernatural*, this "measure of power" mostly results from the creators' considerable dependency on the purchasing power of viewers and readers and has most of all led to the aforementioned attempts at reducing the distance between consumer and producer via fan services and "invitational strategies" (Ross 8). Little watched as *SPN* is, their fans' "measure of power" instead appears to directly translate to participation, agency, and communication.

sustained popularity" (207) of a meta-text, i.e. for its commercial success, the *SPN* community has long distinguished itself through its particularly excessive activity and visibility, especially when one considers that "[u]nlike a massively popular scripted TV show like *The Big Bang Theory* or *The Walking Dead*, it has only about 3 million viewers" (Ulaby), of which not everyone is a fan, or a fanauthor, or a member of its online community. Nevertheless, the fans of *Supernatural*, who Ulaby calls "The Few, The Fervent," regularly make their show trend worldwide on *Twitter*, vote Ackles and Padalecki on the cover of *TV Guide*, and repeatedly win the show People's Choice Awards.[194] Even though many producers of the early 2010s theoretically echo what J.J. Abrams asserts in his allegation that, in contemporary media, "you'd be moronic not to listen to the fans" (qtd. in Veitch), only few fandoms have actually acquired the strength to *make* them listen—the difference lies between being invited to participate via strategies and in pre-defined niches (cf. Ross) or inviting yourself to participate in the meta-text and its production.

The contrast between *Supernatural*'s interaction with its fans and that of other meta-texts becomes increasingly obvious in what I read as the fourth and fifth parts of their extended dialogue. While the latter, i.e. the fanauthors' reaction to being represented in the meta-text along with their activities, may be considered an extension of their 'regular' fanfiction writing and their discussions of the show—i.e. both transformative and non-transformative responses to events in the meta-text—, the producers' willingness to actively interact with their vocal fanbase significantly extends that of the authors of other meta-texts. Transcending acknowledgement of their fanauthors, i.e. giving them the "*sense* […] that they can […] be heard" (Ross 66; my emphasis), they engage with them in reaction to their wishes and demands brought forth both in fanfiction stories and in non-fanfiction venues, and, what is more, they act themselves by making space for fans within

[194] *Supernatural* started trending on *Twitter* in September 2009 with the hashtags #supernatural and #luciferiscoming to celebrate the start of season five; for trending topics related to the show, cf. "Twitter."

Ackles and Padalecki featured on the cover of the 16 December 2010 issue of *TV Guide*, "following a fiercely fought fan voting competition" that pitted *Supernatural* against shows with many times their average viewers. It came out first as "[a]cross Livejournal, Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook, the Supernatural fandom turned the last few hours into a global voting party" ("TV Guide Cover"). Through similar fan effort, *Supernatural* won a number of related competitions over the next few years.

First nominated for a People's Choice Award in 2009, *Supernatural* has since then frequently won Best Sci-Fi/Fantasy Show (2010, 2012, 2013), Favorite Network TV Drama (2012), Favorite TV Fan Following (2013), and Favorite TV Bromance (2014). For more information on both wins and nominations, also of actors of the show, cf. "People's Choice Awards."

the meta-text and thus, so to say, keep the conversation flowing. Rather unique in contemporary TV making, the showrunners contribute to the dialogue instead of stifling it, revealing their investment and attention to the fans and their commitment to uphold the interaction between the two parties. Acknowledgment, reaction, and action therefore create the reciprocity fans desire in their relationship with the producers, lead to the participation they demand, and therefore ultimately validate and prove the efficacy of their textual strategies in regard to the media industry: As seen in its meta-text, *Supernatural* represents an exception among contemporary TV shows as it obviously hears its fans, listens, and reshapes its production in democratic ways to accede to them more space and participation.

Indispensable for creating a dialogue in the first place, recognizing their fanbase and paying attention to fannish voices is something the producers of *SPN* extensively engage in: While as of yet merely few individual creators of other meta-texts such as those of the TV shows *Roswell* or *Farscape* of the early 2000s (cf. Ross 238-39) or of today's *Teen Wolf* (cf. Baker-Whitelaw) profess to be listening to the fans, multiple members of the showrunners of *Supernatural* have stated their intense preoccupation with and acknowledgment of their fans' activities online: So affirms Kripke,[195] for instance, that he "read[s] online as much as anybody" (Interview), "look[s] online for input about the show" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 213), asserts that the producers "pay attention to the fandom" (qtd. in Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 141), confirms that they are aware of fanfiction, and even reads both FPF and RPF himself (cf. *Fandom* 214-15; *Fangasm* 143-44). What is more, Kripke has repeatedly verified the close and intimate relationship the producers of *SPN* have with the show's fandom, mentioning—as quoted in the initial part of this subchapter—that he "love[s] our fans," "love[s] how passionate they are," and that the entire creative team is "so conscious and aware" of them, since, after all, they are "making the show for the fans" (Interview).

In addition, several others of the creative team have given testimony of the attention they devote to the fans, with Gamble, for instance, asserting that she is well aware of "how into the boys' relationship everyone is" (qtd. in Larsen and Zubernis,

[195] In this dialogue between fans and producers, I consider above all statements by Kripke, since he is the one who "created the show," as even 6x15 affirms, and the one whom fandom regards as representative of the other showrunners (cf., for example, Zubernis and Larsen, "Playing God"). The voices of other members of the creative team are meant to complement what he says, providing a comprehensive overview over the relation between the show's fanbase and its creators.

Fangasm 113). Even if she does not read *SPN* fanfiction herself, others such as the actors Collins, Beaver, Lindberg, or Tigerman readily admit to reading stories, discussing their immersion into fandom in interviews and at conventions. Furthermore, close to fifty members of cast and crew, among them the showrunners Thompson, Michaels, and Ladouceur, or the actors Padalecki, Ackles, Collins, and Chau, interact with fans on *Twitter* or *Instagram*, focusing on keeping, as Cohen says, their relationship truly reciprocal: "I try to stay really active (online), answer any question I can, any Happy Birthday I can send out. […] I give to the fans. They give to me. […] I need them. We need each other" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 210-11). Altogether, the creative team engages deeply with the fans and acquires much knowledge about them, their activities and preferences via actively recognizing their presence and being open to truly committing to them. Going online to read—or to look at fan art and fanvids, as Tigerman recounts of a day when "[e]veryone had their laptops out" (qtd. in *Fandom* 213)—apparently constitutes a regular pastime among the creative team of *SPN*, providing the basis for the producers to act in unison with the desires of the fanbase. Their "read[ing] online as much as anybody," as Kripke has it (Interview), makes them aware and leads to procedural decisions that are geared towards according with fannish opinion. In this way, Kripke, for instance, affirmed before the launch of season three in 2007 that the show would not introduce a female love interest for one of the brothers without considering the fandom: "Our fans," he said, "are notoriously protective of our boys. If the chemistry is there, and we see the sparks, and we want it to happen, and the fans want it to happen, it'll happen" (Interview).

Ostensibly giving equal weight to fans' and producers' voices, he clearly negates that the creative team would resolve such essential issues within the course of the meta-text on its own and acknowledges the importance and participation of fandom in the production of the show. Moreover, both Kripke and other producers have repeatedly indeed reacted to fannish opinion, going beyond merely acknowledging and considering the voices out there *before* episodes are made by actively responding to the fanbase and their thoughts about previously aired episodes with explaining themselves *afterwards* and even correcting what they themselves call "mistakes" (Kripke, Interview). Several instances over the past few seasons have therefore evidenced the fact that, as Ackles says, fans are "getting paid attention to by the people creating the show" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 178). In an action that became infamous in fandom, Kripke thus

responded, for example, to "fannish outrage" (Felschow) over 4x06 "Yellow Fever," which was a consequence of fans thinking the episode implied Dean to have become infected with a deathly disease because he was, in Sam's words, a "dick": "None of […] the creative team of SUPERNATURAL," Kripke posted online, "think Dean's ever been a dick, past, present, or future. He's a hero. Dean did NOT contract the ghost sickness because he's a dick" ("Very Special").

As indicated above, the issue of introducing female characters, specifically as love interests for the Winchesters, has long been a rather delicate matter in *Supernatural*, with fans voicing their fierce opposition on numerous occasions. Accordingly, as Felschow notes, some of the most remarkable changes have been made to the meta-text in this context, which truly testify to the significant impact the opinions of the show's fanbase have on its production because here they touch on core matters of the storyline and modify it to a large and long-lasting extent:

> Kripke has, along with members of his writing staff, also revealed that certain story arcs and characters in the show have been altered, reconceived, or entirely axed as a result of fan reaction. Most notably, in season 2 the character of Jo Harvelle began as a strong female character and a possible romantic interest for Dean Winchester (2.02 "Everybody Loves a Clown"). She then shifted to more of a little sister figure and a damsel in distress (2.06 "No Exit," 2.14 "Born Under a Bad Sign"), before she was erased from the show entirely. The adjustment of Jo Harvelle and her exit from the narrative were based on the reactions from the show's predominantly female fan base, which immediately made clear they brooked no interference with the Winchester brothers' solid relationship by an outside female source.

Ultimately, the case of Jo Harvelle was however just one of the instances in which fans caused major alterations in the meta-text, proving to be powerful enough so as to force the producers to rework their conception of an entire character and its storyline. The fans' disapproval of similar attempts to have the brothers give up their solitary life on the road has in the end even led the showrunners to completely shelve the idea of pairing either Sam or Dean with anyone in a long-term relationship, keeping them on their own up until the current eleventh season. In response to the fans' overwhelmingly negative reactions to the character of Jo, Kripke has consequently taken pains to assure them that new female characters, who would, for example, appear in season three, would "*not* [be] introduced as love interests"; instead, they would be "introduced as antagonists," since he

"know[s] people weren't thrilled about Jo last season, but we feel we've learned from that mistake" (Interview).[196]

'Learning from mistakes' seems to have become a major characteristic of *Supernatural*, with the producers frequently reacting to their fans with both minor and major changes to the meta-text. Again, a statement by Kripke here markedly illustrates what distinguishes this show from others when he discusses that they might in upcoming seasons "make missteps, as any show does. But the difference between us and other shows is when *they* make missteps, they say 'Go f— yourself.' When *we* make missteps, we pay attention to the fans and we course-correct" (Interview). Highlighting twice within the same interview that they "course-correct" after fans inform them of "mistakes" or "missteps," Kripke acknowledges, first, the significance of fannish participation in the creation of the shared universe of *SPN*, and, secondly, stresses that the producers in fact react in response to fannish opinion. Other members of the creative team also echo his willingness to not dominate the production of the show, claiming that they "do what [they] can to incorporate [fannish] desires into the storytelling of the show" and that "Eric Kripke does a great job ingesting and redefining the feedback we get" (McG qtd. in Bekakos). Ultimately, Kripke himself probably best describes the relation between the showrunners and the fanbase, saying in response to a fan's question, "You force me to make the show better, so how could I not love you?" ("*Supernatural*").

Reacting to the fanbase thus seems to be an essential part of producing *Supernatural*, which claims to be "really open to self reflection [sic]" and whose producers "don't" conceptualize their position like those of "the majority of shows [who] have this attitude like, we know better" (Kripke qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 179). Put succinctly, *SPN*'s "attitude" is rather different from much of contemporary TV making: "Fans complained; Show listened," as Zubernis and Larsen say (*Fandom* 179)—

[196] Even the antagonist characters of Ruby and Bela Kripke refers to here met with fierce fannish opposition in the course of season three, which leads Felschow to conclude that "by season 4" the producers "had [finally] learned their lesson [since the] only lead character added to the roster [in season four] was Castiel, angel of the Lord and decidedly male, while Ruby was revealed to be a traitor and violently killed."

Women as love interests for the Winchesters would only reappear in season six, when Dean even lives with his girlfriend Lisa and her son Ben for a while—but only because he thinks Sam is trapped in hell and wants to fulfill his last promise to his brother that he "go live some normal, apple-pie life" (5x22) in the event of Sam's death. Upon having his brother back, however, Dean struggles with committing equally to the two important people in his life and finally decides to go back to hunting with Sam (6x06). A similar issue reappears in early season eight, when Sam briefly has a girlfriend while he believes Dean to be in purgatory, only to give her up for his brother soon after Dean's return (8x10).

the creative team does not shy away from real dialogue but reacts to fannish voices, integrates their opinions into the meta-text, and organizes the production process along more democratic and participatory patterns. What is more, the producers do not stop at responding to the show's fanbase, "mak[ing] the show better" in consequence to the "force" of their opinions (Kripke, "*Supernatural*"), but in fact actively nurture the interaction by acting of their own to encourage further dialogue. As the previous subchapter has illustrated extensively, the showrunners strongly commit to conversation with their fanbase—they incorporate fans and fannish activities in the meta-text, situating episodes as responses to fanfiction, fannish topics and preferences, and to the fans' claims to agency and power.

Episodes such as 4x18, 5x01, 5x09, 6x15, 7x08, 8x11, or 9x04 can thus be considered the creators' continuation of the dialogue, in which they on the one hand react to and use what they become aware of in their prolific reading online and on the other hand produce new material fans can in turn respond to, both in transformative and non-transformative activities. In this way, the showrunners' actions keep the conversation flowing, once more illustrating their willingness to productively engage with fandom and to commit to open dialogue. While storylines such as 4x18's thus give them the chance to embark on "poking… very loving fun" at fans (Kripke qtd. in Felschow), they also allow them more generally to set about "[r]ipping down the fourth wall […] and exploring some of the uneasy issues and conflicts that arise between fictional subjects, their creators, and the fans who enjoy the work" (Kripke qtd. in Jester). Pronouncing this demolition of the fourth wall "great fun," Kripke also acknowledges that this is "something most shows don't get the opportunity to do" (qtd. in Jester), clarifying that in contrast to other meta-texts it has always been his intention to "create a universe where we welcome others to come and play" (Zubernis and Larsen, "*Supernatural* Nostalgia").[197]

With their actions both on screen and off-screen, the producers clearly adhere to Kripke's concept of *SPN*, establishing and perpetuating this shared and open universe by giving fans the space to participate in the meta-text and its production. The episodes that pick up on fandom thus transcend the invitations other meta-texts issue to their fans, since

[197] While Kripke's statement may also be read as a negation of the idea that it was the fans who changed something about the production process of *Supernatural* because Kripke wanted "others to come and play" from the start, it may also be understood as a reinforcement of what I discuss here since he confirms that the fans do in fact excert influence on the show—that it is not only make believe on part of the producers to keep the fans loyal to *SPN*.

they do not represent narrow channels of possible tele-participation but reinforce what fandom has been doing on its own—fandom has needed no invitation to create fanfiction, to write Wincest, to write Mary Sues, or to write RPF; in short, fandom has needed no invitation to become powerful. In a truly dialogic structure that depends on two empowered parties, the creators of the meta-text and its fans engage in conversation, with the actions of the former a major element of the sustained interactivity of the show, since it is their willingness to commit to the fans that constitutes the single most important difference to other meta-texts. As such, especially the episodes that show fans, fanfiction, or other fannish activities or that are structured like some of its most popular genres actively keep the dialogue open, providing further incitement to *SPN*'s online fandom instead of stifling its productivity: That the creators of the meta-text are ready to give space to the show's fanauthors and to utterly "demolis[h]" (Wilkinson) the fourth wall is what makes the relationship between fans and producers so "symbiotic" (Rhodes qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 197) and so very "reciprocal" (*Fandom* 13).

Not confined to the episodes themselves, reciprocity continues to dominate the conversation between *Supernatural*'s producers and its fanbase, since in true dialogic fashion fans respond to the actions of the producers, naturally acknowledging and reacting to being included in the meta-text with fan characters and fan activities. Nurturing the ongoing dialogue between all involved, they create stories that take up *SPN*'s on-screen fans and its fanfiction storylines, adding their own twists and versions to Becky's Wincest story or her marriage, liberating Demian and Barnes from their lives in blue collar jobs, and giving Charlie new "adventure[s]" (9x04) with the Winchesters. So has *FanFiction.Net*, for instance, dozens of stories that feature Becky, hundreds of stories that feature Charlie, and some more hundreds of stories that directly reference the episodes analyzed in this thesis. Furthermore voicing their opinions in non-transformative venues such as message boards, blogs, or at conventions, fanauthors thus altogether respond strongly to their representations within the meta-text, affirming that for them just like for the showrunners the conversation never ends: "[I]f we're allowed to write fanfiction about the show," states, for instance, rogueslayer452 in response to 5x01, "they are totally allowed to write fanfiction about us, the fandom. It's a complete circle now, the love is mutual and come on, they mock us because they love us."

Using the image of the circle, rogueslayer452 highlights the "complete" reciprocity *Supernatural* has achieved with its fandom, giving everyone the chance to participate,

valuing everyone's input and opinion. Instead of the one-sided and rather unrequited emotions fans bring to other meta-texts, here "the love is mutual," with both fans and producers engaging with and committing to each other. "What a fandom this is," andreth47 therefore writes appreciatively, "and what a strange and wonderful relationship we have with the showrunner. An almost…co-dependent and incestuously close relationship, one might say" ("Ever"). Alluding to the genre of Wincest fanfiction and the infamous quote from 5x18 that pronounces Sam and Dean to be "psychotically, irrationally, erotically codependent on each other," andreth47 reinforces here that the creators of *SPN* neither reign hegemonially nor deign to grant fans some share in the meta-text as contemporary television producers are wont to position themselves; instead, both fandom and the creative team depend and rely on each other, engaging in a "wonderful" and "close relationship" that has the two parties dissolve the distance between them to create a shared fictional universe. Fannish activities, acknowledges McG in the same vein as the fanauthors, "contribut[e] to the mythology of the show very nicely" (qtd. in Bekakos), causing *SPN* to be "so participatory and interactive" (Speight qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196) so as to make the "audience […] integral to the art" (Rhodes qtd. in *Fandom* 197).

In the end, my study thus illustrates that it is seems in fact to be true dialogue which characterizes the relationship between the producers and fans of *Supernatural*, with both parties committed to maintaining their conversation. Kripke, in particular, "has been savvy enough to monitor his fandom fairly closely from the start" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 157), going online to read and going to conventions to interact in order to become deeply familiar with the fans' activities and to position himself and the entire team of showrunners as "truly partnered with the fans of the show" (McG qtd. in Bekakos). Not only "[a]rmed with a great deal of fandom knowledge," as Zubernis and Larsen write (*Fandom* 157), but actively devoted to establishing dialogue—to establishing the "complete circle" rogueslayer452 ascertains to exist in *SPN*—, the show's producers appear committed to transcending previous conceptions of the relationship between a meta-text and its fanbase. Epitomized by the "carnival atmosphere" of conventions (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 21), where fans and the creative team are "hanging out" and "singing together" (Cohen qtd. in *Fandom* 196), *Supernatural* ostensibly eliminates much of the distance that conventionally divides producers and fandom as it focuses on involving the latter and making them "part of the process" (Speight qtd. in *Fandom* 196).

So admits Jim Beaver to thinking, "these people could write for the show," when reading some particularly "impressive" piece of fanfiction (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 223); and Matt Cohen even says of the producers and the fans that, "We're the same people" (qtd. in *Fandom* 196), emphasizing in his exaggeration that the fanbase has a share in the production and that the producers are willing to involve them to an unprecedented degree. Instead of the meta-text presenting each week the voice of the producers only, it thus brings to the screen the multiple voices that have contributed to the dialogue both in online blogs, forums, and transformative fiction and in offline encounters at conventions. Again, none may in the end be better suited to describing *SPN*'s "commitment to communication" (M. Gray) and its interactive nature than Kripke, who avows the participation of the fanbase with an unequivocal, "You force me to make the show better" ("*Supernatural*"): Fans have the agency to enact changes in the meta-text, exerting their power along the democratic principles of participation and dialogue.

4.4 Indicative of a New Balance of Power? *Supernatural*'s Participatory Approach to Making TV

"[W]e are the Becky to his Chuck," missyjack ends an online discussion about the relation between the fans of *Supernatural* and its creators, here once again personified by Eric Kripke ("Ever"). Brief as it may be, her statement encapsulates much of what makes their "reciprocal" and "symbiotic" relationship so "special" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 13, 197, 196) and what makes it, as I conclude, potentially indicative of a new balance of power *SPN* may initiate within the media industry through its dialogic and participatory approach to making TV. Strikingly, the show displays an unprecedented interdependence of fans and producers in its meta-text, disclosing how different it is compared to other TV shows or other meta-texts in general: Becky, the "number one fan" (5x01), is not independent from Chuck, the incompetent "Prophet of the Lord" (4x18), since he provides the objects of her fandom with the *Supernatural* book series; Chuck, who is less knowledgeable about his novels than she is (5x09), is in turn not independent from Becky, who is instrumental in saving *SPN*'s fictional universe (5x01; 5x09), since he needs "[her] help" (5x01). Even on a first glance, *Supernatural*'s fanbase is in fact the Becky to *Supernatural*'s producers, since the "writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved on some level in collectively creating the world of the show" (CordeliaGray); they all participate, they are "all involved," they all "help."

Representative of *SPN*'s fandom, Becky is a devoted fan, she is a prolific fanauthor, she writes Wincest fanfiction. Just like fans have time and again proven essential in having "saved the show season after season" (Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 170), she is important because her messages have the power to prevent the Apocalypse and her knowledge is indispensable in averting harm from Sam and Dean. Similar to incidents as what became known, for example, as the "Flying Fangirl," when a fangirl launched herself at Ackles at the *Asylum* 2007 convention (cf. "Asylum 1 2007"; Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 116-17), Becky may be somewhat irritating in her devotion to the Winchesters and meeting her may be "awkward" for the brothers (5x01), but ultimately she turns out to be the "yin to [Chuck's] proud yang" (5x09): Fans and producers complement each other, and one cannot exist without the other—they commit to a close and intimate union because, as Becky says of her relationship with Chuck, "the heart wants what the heart wants" (5x09). In the end, it is even her drugging of Sam, which she justifies with "I want you! And this is the only way!" (7x08), that echoes the practices of

SPN's fanauthors as, apart from its Mary Sue structure, the episode lends itself to being read as a metaphor for fanfiction writing—which is after all a powerful way for fans to "hogt[ie]" (7x08) characters they "want" and make them their own.

Similar to Becky's embodiment of the fanbase, Chuck serves as a representative of *SPN*'s creative team, functioning as their avatar (cf., for example, Zubernis and Larsen, "Playing God") in that he is the creator of the *Supernatural* novels. Echoing prominent conceptions of Western literary culture, he first stylizes himself as a "cruel, cruel capricious [author-]god" (4x18), yet he ultimately conforms to the participatory practices and principles the show's producers profess to adhere to: Just like they "pay attention to the fandom" (Kripke qtd. in Larsen and Zubernis, *Fangasm* 141) and "incorporate [their] desires into the storytelling of the show" (McG qtd. in Bekakos), Chuck cannot determine events on his own since he is a mere "mouthpiece" of the "inspired word" (4x18). Fallible and "not a good writer" (5x09), he accordingly needs his fans to "help" (5x01) him: While Becky repeatedly gives Sam and Dean the chance to save the world from the Apocalypse, the *SPN* fanbase time and again 'helps' the show to "course-correct" after their "mistakes" (Kripke, Interview). Altogether, the meta-text thus illustrates Chuck to be foremost defined by not at all shying away from engaging with his fans and specifically his fanauthors, committing himself to interaction and dialogue to mirror the show's producers, who engage in creating an "all 'us'" (Rhodes qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 197) with the fans.

Ultimately, both the meta-text of *Supernatural* and its paratexts such as convention statements and interviews therefore time and again reinforce the truth of missyjack's conclusion that "we are the Becky to his Chuck": In the show, the fans seem to be "truly partnered" (McG qtd. in Bekakos) with the creators, they appear as essential to the story, and can ostensibly shape the meta-text through their activities. Based on the force of their Internet presence, they have seemingly managed to commit the producers to an overarching and all-encompassing dialogue that the two parties conduct across several media channels and that, most significantly, also finds its manifestation within the meta-text itself. Fans, fandom, fannishness, and fanfiction loom large in the show's text, dominating specific episodes to give testimony of the space and participation the fanbase has acquired in processes of production. From the first, still implicit references to the fan-favorite genre of Wincest, to the explicit agency and power of fans such as Charlie or to structuring entire episodes in analogy to fanfiction tropes and themes—*SPN*'s fandom has

long been present in the meta-text in many different forms and has affected it to a large degree: Via appearing as "slash fan[s]" and "Sam girls" and "Dean girls" (4x18), as simpatico, as Becky, as Demian and Barnes, or as Charlie, fanauthors actively participate in the meta-text; the actions of these fan characters, who prevent Lucifer's coming, save numerous people from being killed, vanquish ghosts, and bring treacherous demons, evil sorcerers, and the Wicked Witch of the West to justice, testify to fannish agency and power; the plot of the respective episodes mirrors either the fans' empowerment and their empowered status or, what is more, the genres of their fanfiction to evidence the producers' appreciation of and attention to fandom.

Abounding with many details referencing fannish activities, with transplanting Mary Sue, RPF, and AU to the screen, with having the fannish archive *Kripke'd* by episodes, the meta-text appears to provide substantial proof of the fanauthors' participation in the production of the show and simultaneously offers visual testimony of the producers' commitment to what comes across as true interaction with the fanbase. As my analysis of selected episodes and my overview over the dialogue involving transformative and non-transformative forms of communication have shown, *Supernatural*'s fanwriters may have ultimately "gained a measure of power"—and, at that, they may have gained this power most of all "through transformative fan works" (Sivarajan). Their prolific fanfiction writing constitutes a significant foundation for their particular strength and visibility as a fandom, which has in consequence obviously compelled the producers to acknowledge and react to them with specific episodes and modifications to the meta-text in general—which in turn has made the fans recognize that they have agency within the production of *SPN*. While Sivarajan concludes from her reading of 4x18 that altogether "the effect that fans have is still minor," I argue in regard to my much more comprehensive study that the "effect" the fans have on the meta-text and on the show as such is actually far from "minor": The fact that they appear to alter, first, how the showrunners perceive them—i.e. as empowered partners in a dialogue instead of an audience to be, put bluntly, exploited—and, secondly, that they appear to influence what they watch on their screens every week shows their substantial impact on *Supernatural*, particularly in light of the at times vastly divergent practices of contemporary TV shows and the media industry at large.

While other meta-texts mainly rely on fannish participation in response to invitation or profess to be close to fandom with intermittent examples of fan service that

usually do not transcend superficial engagement with fannish activities, genres, or conventions, my analysis in the previous subchapters illustrates that *SPN*'s fanbase appears to have acquire decidedly more far-reaching agency than most, if not all, others: A little show that needs a devoted fanbase to survive—and whose producers may thus be more likely to actually listen to and work with the fans—has therefore likely made true what Felschow asserts as part of her conclusion of her analysis of 4x18, i.e. that the "fan can exert control over the producer and the text without being expressly invited or permitted to do so." While she qualifies her statement in similarity to Sivarajan, claiming that her study, which cuts off just as the show "enters season 5," also shows that even in *SPN* "the producer most often has control over both text and the fan," later episodes and the non-transformative dialogue between fans and showrunners evaluated here certainly alter the picture she presents to indicate a greater balance of power: The fandom-heavy episodes of seasons five to eleven shed a different light on her concluding assessment that fans only have agency "sometimes," since episodes such as 5x09 or 7x08 or the character of Charlie give evidence of the fanauthors' longer-lasting impact on the production and the meta-text of *SPN*. Altogether, the relationship between the fanbase and the creative team in *Supernatural* therefore seems to correspond more closely to what Lisa Schmidt's analysis of 4x18 offers, i.e. that—despite all commercial interests at play— "the relations between producer and consumer, authorship and reception have come to resemble, increasingly, an actual relationship." Adding that she "might even consider applying the adjective *codependent*" in the case of *SPN,* Schmidt may thus best of all previous scholars express from the vantage point of their small studies what makes the show's meta-text and the dialogic paratext so particularly suited for reading it as a possible forerunner for future developments in TV making.

While Schmidt bases her assessment of the relation between fans and producers on the notion that both "can become passionately invested in the same story" and "both can suffer from a lack of control over the story," I would, however, stress a rather different foundation for my similar conclusion that there is in fact "an actual relationship" between fans and the creative team—one that my study certainly allows to be read as "*codependent*," since it rests on dialogue, a "commitment to communication" (M. Gray), the feeling that the "love is mutual" (rogueslayer452), and, most of all, fannish participation. Rather than Schmidt's reasoning that the connection between the creative team and the show's fanbase rests on the fact that, on the one hand, both parties are 'fans'

of the same show in terms of their emotional connection to it and, on the other, that both are not able to exert control over its course at all points due to the simultaneous involvement of two agents and, in case of the producers, "whims of corporate decision making," my research has instead shown that these points cannot be considered the main point of their 'codependence': On the basis of the meta-text and its surrounding dialogue, this thesis illustrates that, first, fans have seemingly been able to empower themselves through their fannish activities, using their fanfiction to significantly alter their traditional conceptualization as consumers, and, secondly, that the producers have apparently accepted this empowerment through willing engagement with fandom and its fan-works. In contrast to Schmidt's conclusion that rests on *similarities* of attitudes and practices, my assessment of characterizing the relationship between the creative team and the fanbase as "*codependent*" accordingly results from their *commitment to* each other.

Ultimately, this dissertation is thus the first analysis within fan studies to provide an adequate representation of *Supernatural*'s conception as a participatory TV show, whose increasingly democratic involvement of fannish voices ostensibly evidences the efficacy of the fanauthors' strategies as displayed in their fanfiction. At the moment, as my study has demonstrated, *SPN*'s fanbase may thus well be considered among the—or even *the*—most powerful within contemporary media due to its dialogic participation within the meta-text and its production. Despite the extent of its agency, however, it nevertheless needs to be acknowledged that the *Supernatural* fandom is certainly still caught up in a situation of 'codependence' with the producers: The fans are decidedly empowered and in fact know of their power, but they also need to acknowledge the showrunners as *TPTB*, i.e. as The Powers That Be (and which cannot be easily dismissed or fully demoted); in contrast, the producers appear to acknowledge, react, and commit to the fanbase and even provide with the meta-text a platform to increase fannish visibility, but they also use their *TPTB* status to make procedural decisions against preferences of the fanbase as when, for instance, Sam at first seems to dismiss his brother for his girlfriend in season eight. Clearly, a negotiation of power between fans and producers is currently taking place within the show and possibly within the media landscape at large, which reinforces that *SPN* neither constitutes a meta-text in the traditional sense of the word—i.e. one that is published without fannish involvement—nor that it conforms to the limited extents of contemporary audience engagement in other meta-texts. Rather, the space fans seemingly have in its meta-text and the share they seemingly have in its production speak

for reading it as potentially leading the way in a future revolution within the media industry that (may need to) grant fans and audiences increasing participation. As my analysis suggests, the tide in this negotiation ultimately seems to be turning in favor of the fans—and may in the wake of *SPN* and similar attempts to bridge the distance between fans and producers possibly also do so in the larger context of the media landscape: After all, 5x09 still presented a story of empowerment, while Charlie, who first appears at the end of season seven more than two years later, enters the meta-text already in a position of power.

While the fans of *SPN* are therefore certainly not at all solely in command of the production of the show and cannot influence each and every episode to the same degree, they are no longer anything like the "powerless elite" Tulloch and Jenkins declared fans to be in 1995 (141, 144-72, 178) nor, despite its producers' commercial interests, merely courted consumers as which the large majority of other meta-texts of today's media landscape tends to define their audiences. In this way, their status as participants in *Supernatural* may in fact represent a new positioning of fans and fanauthors, or viewers and readers in general—one that has them as of yet situated in an intermediate phase of negotiation but which may, in the long run, revolutionize the media landscape towards more fannish involvement and along more democratic principles. The interaction of fans and producers and the representation of fandom in the meta-text of the show render this negotiation visible, thus drawing attention to the significant "measure of power" fans have apparently gained through their "transformative works" (Sivarajan) and to the efficacy of their strategies within fanfiction: Becky, Demian and Barnes, Charlie, Sera, Chuck, Becky's Wincest story, fannish help, fans saving the Winchesters, Charlie's queenship, Becky's union with Chuck, *Kripke'd* fanfiction, an AU story slashing the show's fans, an RPF story killing the producers, a Mary Sue story marrying Sam to a fan, a virtual fanfiction episode about *The Wizard of Oz*—they all seem to validate that the producers have come to accept the powerful fanauthor, have invested the time and the effort to familiarize themselves intensely with fannish writing, its conventions, and, in particular, its language; that they have recognized the strength of their communities and the authority of the fannish experts, and have acknowledged their demonstration of power in disclaimers, Mary Sues and RPF, where fanauthors verbalize the democratic archive, their own entry into and possession of the archive, and their agency to create a meta-text of

their own. In short, in *SPN* fanfiction does not only "unleash [fannish] imagination," as *FanFiction.Net* has it, but unleashes their power.

In the end, *Supernatural* thus presents itself as increasingly participatory, and its involvement of fans suggests a transfer of principles from the realm of fanfiction to the production of the show: Analogously to the concept of the fannish democratic archive that is "forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents" (Derecho 64) and "invites" everyone to "enter it" and "make new artifacts" (Derecho 65), *SPN* shows to be "open to new entries" and gives its fanwriters the chance to "enter it" and participate in its further enlargement. As such, it may not be too far-fetched to pronounce *Supernatural* as potentially revealing the future of TV making—a future that may be based on a revolution of the media industry in form of re-conceptualizing it along this very same fannish democratic archive, so that it may become more open to participation and "new contents" from non-industry members and may welcome audiences to "enter" it and its texts more freely than previously. Integrative of fandom as it appears to be, *SPN* therefore suggests that the fanauthors' conception of texts as archontic and their demands to a more democratic understanding of media production may be leading the way to the future of a more communal form of creating popular culture—one that depends on dialogue, involvement, and participation. While even in *Supernatural*, fans and producers are therefore not yet, to invoke Cohen once more, "the same people" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196), the fanauthors may here pave the way for transforming media production, since in *SPN* they definitely appear to be "the Becky to [their] Chuck" (missyjack, "Ever")—here, the fanbase is obviously "integrated […] into [the meta-text's] universe" and "the writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved […] in collectively creating the world of the show" (CordeliaGray).

5. The Agency of the Fanauthor and the Power of Fanfiction: Restructuring the Media Landscape via Democratic Intervention

> williamgraaham: "I'm pretty sure if like 10 supernatural fans got together and rewrote seasons 8 and 9 we would have a hell of a good show."
>
> ambular-d: "Depends on the fans. I mean we might get a great show, or we might get Gabriel popping up out of nowhere wearing the Samulet with Adam in tow and zapping Cas and Dean into an inescapable honeymoon suite and then forcing Sam to let Gabe braid his hair and feed him Skittles while an exact clone duplicate of Dean gives him a blowjob. Meanwhile the mysteriously resurrected Hendrickson shoots Garth for no particular reason and then works on thwarting Crowley's plan to take over the world in cahoots with the demon Bela Talbot and Gordon Walker who's somehow escaped Purgatory, with help from the Impala which has been transformed into Gina Torres, and Andy, who it turns out cleverly faked his own death. Charlie comes back from Oz to recruit all the fallen angels into her LARP and Kevin reconstitutes his own body by the power of sheer Advanced Placement Pissed-Off-At-Everything-Ness, and Chuck finally shows up to apologize to everyone for being a fucked-up drunk absentee God and brings back everybody else and they all live happily ever after in the Bunker. Except Garth."
>
> caswouldratherbehere: "I'd watch that."
>
> Conversation qtd. from caswouldratherbehere's *Tumblr*.

In a nutshell, this brief conversation between the three *Supernatural* fans williamgraaham, ambular-d, and caswouldratherbehere encapsulates major issues discussed in this thesis, pointing towards, as the title of this conclusion has it, the agency of the fanauthors, the power of fanfiction, and the contemporary restructuring of the media landscape via the fans' democratic intervention. Poignantly, williamgraaham expresses here the dissatisfaction with the meta-text, here *Supernatural*, that is at the core of fanfiction, emphasizing that it needs fannish participation to make it "a hell of a good show." Like millions of other fanauthors, he considers the meta-text to be "insufficient" (Fiske 42), i.e. open for fannish involvement and transformation, and underlines that the fans not only have the power to "rewr[i]te" the text but to make it "good," thus arguing along the lines of the definition of fanfiction a fan offers at the website *TV Tropes*: "If you want something done right, do it yourself" ("Fanfic"). Moreover, his brief statement alludes to one of the major characteristics of fanfiction and the fanwriters' community, i.e. the fact that fanfiction writing is never a solitary enterprise but "fans g[e]t together" to make it a communal and dialogic practice that involves multiple voices. This notion also

pervades the statement ambular-d responds with, which highlights the wide variety of opinions and preferences to be found in the fannish archive: Her words make clear that fanfiction is never uniform, one-dimensional, or one-voiced but instead brings together diverse ideas and approaches that altogether reconceptualize the meta-text from something that is "solidified, calcified, or at rest" into a participatory archontic text, whose multiple contributors ensure that it "is in continuous play, its characters, stories, and meanings all varying through the various fics written about it" (Derecho 77).

Alluding to numerous kinds of stories fans have written in response to complaints about wanting "more of" and "more from" (Pugh, *Democratic Genre* 19) the meta-text of *Supernatural*, ambular-d condenses the archive that fans have created with their fanfiction writing into a sketch of what the program would look like if written by williamgraaham's "10 supernatural fans." Her vision of a fannish "great show," i.e. the archontic assortment of various stories, characters, storylines, perspectives, and pairings, accentuates the participation of a wide multiplicity of voices and the need to read "individual fanfics as part of a larger whole, as part of an archive that both extends and enlarges the original source" (Parrish, "Back" 178). The archive, with all its "mysteriously resurrected" characters, with people "popping up out of nowhere," and with everyone "liv[ing] happily ever after," most of all visualizes the power of the fanauthors—the "freedom," as Kim Bannister so poignantly expresses it in the quote that introduces this dissertation, "we have allowed ourselves to create and recreate our characters over and over again," to "give them an infinite, always-changing life rather than the single life of their original creation": The participatory nature of fanfiction, she continues, "meld[s]" all these stories "together to form a whole new creation"; in the end, it is thus the archive which signals that "[w]e have the power" (qtd. in Jenkins, "Reading" 140).

Explicit in the archive that has stories from every corner of fanfiction and enables fans to read about "the same two people falling in love in 5000 different ways" (sleepingalone), participation is one of the key concepts the entire genre of fanfiction is based on and something all these fans address in their statements: Fanwriters "g[e]t together" to transform the meta-text into a multi-voiced archive in which each of the fans' "5000 different ways" of telling a story and each aspect of the characters' "infinite, always-changing life" is appreciated and which includes every fanauthor and every fanauthor's writing. The archontic drive to "always produce more archive, to enlarge itself" (Derecho 64) can only be satisfied by participation, by millions of fans contributing

to the archive of the meta-text through millions of stories that dissolve traditional hierarchies and binaries to situate the meta-text as just one among the many voices that make up the archive. Instead of adhering to the conventional conception of the meta-text as "at rest" (Derecho 77) and far from de Certeau's/Jenkins's suggestion that "readers are travellers [who] move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write" (174; *Textual Poachers* 24), the archive thus positions itself as inherently democratic—as founded upon the cornerstones of multiplicity, fluidity, involvement, equality, and participation.

Transforming the meta-text into an archive, fanwriters and their fanfiction have departed from conceptualizing the author as an "Author-God" (Barthes, *Image* 146) and the meta-text as representing the "hegemony of a single and unitary language" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 367) in order to foreground a more heteroglossic and dialogic approach to writing, creating meta-texts, and producing cultural artifacts. As such, they have also come a long way from earlier designations by Jenkins and others that defined them as poachers, whose activities were regarded as constituting an "impertinent raid on the literary preserve" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24). The participatory archive has made them overcome the conceptual distance between fans and producers which Jenkins's oft-quoted concept with its abundance of negatively connoted phrases such as the above of the 'raiding nomads' (24) and its definition of fans as "peasants" (27), i.e. as situated in a position of "cultural marginality and social weakness" (26), to some degree even perpetuated. In contrast, this thesis demonstrates that reading their understanding of the meta-text and processes of production in a democratic, integrative, and expansive—i.e. archontic—manner corresponds much more closely to fanfiction as it is practiced in today's online spaces, and, what is more, enables conceptualizing its contemporary outreach to non-fannish venues of cultural production.

As my case study of the meta-textual representation of fans and fanfiction and the dialogic environment of *Supernatural* has illustrated, the archive can nowadays be understood as being no longer confined to fandom but as beginning to spread to spaces in the media industry that have long been relatively unaffected by fannish activities. With the exception of reacting to fans' productivity with cease-and-desist letters or being pressured to renew a TV show, the media industry up until recently has had little to no contact with the transformative work of fans and, specifically, with the changes in the fannish approach to getting a share in production their activities have engendered: Writing within an

archontic environment that thrives through the contributions of multiple voices has gradually made fanauthors claim similar agency in regard to the meta-text—has made them claim to be able to contribute to it. Responses to the intensifying power and visibility of fanauthors, contemporary developments such as the growing evidence of "invitational strategies" (Ross 8) in TV shows of the early 2010s or the share fans have acquired in the meta-text of *SPN* accordingly lead me to suggest that today's media landscape may slowly be changing along the principles of the fannish democratic archive, i.e. may ultimately come to be increasingly based on the integration of fannish voices, the participation of fandom in the creation of meta-texts, and, most importantly, a more equal distribution of power between fans and producers and less pronounced distance between the two parties.

Briefly addressed already in the conclusive paragraphs of the last chapter, the expansion of the fannish democratic archive appears to be a viable concept with which to grasp current trends in the media landscape, providing a possible framework for understanding developments in the production of meta-texts whose participatory scope transcends those of strategic invitation. With*in* fanfiction, the archive's emphasis on multiple voices and genuine participation plays an essential role in making fanauthors realize their agency, since it is their dialogic writing and its millions of stories that transforms the meta-text and ensures the dissolution of traditional hierarchies that would have positioned the meta-text as superior (cf. Derecho 65); in this way the notion of the archive comprises the foundation for statements such as williamgraaham's that the productive power of "10 supernatural fans" would make it a "hell of a good show" or similar ones quoted in the course of this dissertation which highlight that fanfiction is "120,000,000% fixing canon because canon is WRONG" (Hatteress qtd. in foxesonstilts). In a second important step, however, conceptualizing the meta-text and its fanfiction as a democratic archive also offers fanauthors the chance to carry this agency *beyond* fandom because the archive is above all defined by its capacity for "infinite expansion" (Derecho 65)—an expansion that I would no longer consider limited to adding more and more texts of fanfiction *to* the archive of its meta-text (cf. Derecho 65) but which I would like to reconsider in consequence of my analysis of *Supernatural*, where the texts of fanfiction expand *into* the meta-text and so transfer the principles of the democratic archive I newly defined in this dissertation to the production of the meta-text and to the production of cultural goods in general: The show appears to operate on the ideas of fannish representation, involvement, and visibility which demonstrate that the archontic principle

of continuous enlargement does not stop at the borders of fandom but crosses over into the meta-text.

Conceptualizing *SPN* as a participatory TV show, whose integration of fannish voices can be read along the lines of the democratic archive, thus enables me not only to adequately represent the agency of the fanauthors and their writing in its production but to give my dissertation a broader scope that substantiates my findings of the power of fanfiction: Reading the show as a forerunner of a possible revolution of TV making, I accordingly suggest that its application of archontic principles helps understanding the extent to which fans and their transformative works may, first, influence the creation of (in particular, serial) meta-texts in the coming years, and, secondly, to what extent their participation may restructure the media industry at large through transforming the currently prevalent notion of production to eventually include the idea of an archival "gathering together" of voices (Derrida 3) to make it "open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents" (Derecho 64). Just like ambular-d draws up a vision of a fannish version of *Supernatural* that brings together the virtually infinite storylines of the fanauthors' archive, future meta-texts that were to follow suit in terms of the show's integration of fans into its production—or, rather, that were to even expand *SPN*'s integrative approach and democratic tendencies—would consequently no longer be uniform and one-voiced. Instead, they would mirror the power of "[w]e the fans" (hazel-3017) through corresponding to the principles of the democratic archive in, first, representing the fans and their fan-works or encoding their presence; secondly, involving them in the production by incorporating their opinions and preferences; and thirdly, sharing power with them to acquire a greater balance of power between fans and producers in the media landscape.

Ultimately, as ambular-d's approach of describing the fannish archive as a vision of the show itself and caswouldratherbehere's emphatic response of "I'd watch that [episode/show/meta-text]" imply, the archive's defining principle of expansion through participation begins to be less restricted to fanfiction writing because it has already made the first forays into transcending the boundaries of a fictional engagement with the meta-text to have an actual impact upon the creation of cultural artifacts. In consequence, fanfiction shows its true power not only by embodying the democratic principles of visibility, representation, equality, and involvement within its writing and its communities but because it has begun to have its fanauthors participate actively in the shaping of

culture, to have its fans' activities restructure the media industry, and to have its multi-voiced communities dissolve traditional hegemonies so that in the end "[w]e, the fans" renegotiate and redistribute power. Expanding *Supernatural*'s integrative approach, a more archontic media landscape in which multiple participants work with the text and ensure its continuous "enlargement and accretion" (Derecho 64) would thus greatly diminish the distance between producer and fan, between creator and recipient, between author and audience—it would dissolve the traditional binary to the extent of making them increasingly analogous to each other: The fanauthor would then turn into a fanproducer—*SPN*'s Matt Cohen's statement of "We're the same people" (qtd. in Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom* 196) might ultimately show to be an adequate representation of the future position of writers and fanwriters.

While the democratic archive may therefore present a viable projection for restructuring the media landscape via fannish/audience intervention in the years and decades to come, as of yet the concept above all helps grasping both past and recent changes within the media industry and within the relation between fanauthors and meta-textual creators, providing a better understanding of the power of fanfiction as discussed in this thesis. Today's necessity to regard fanauthors *as* fanauthors, i.e. as active participants in the production of cultural goods and as active shapers of culture, poignantly evidences that fans are not at all "[f]ar from being writers," are no "poaching" "nomads" (de Certeau 174; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 24), and no "peasants" needing to "beg" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 27, 26)—as such, the very presence of the fanauthor who creates and participates in the archive compellingly affirms the efficacy of the strategies of appropriation and empowerment as interwoven with their texts: As argued over the course of the past chapters, the fact that fanwriters and the power they have acquired have nowadays little to nothing in common with the active but dependent poachers from more than two decades ago needs to be seen as an immediate consequence of their fanfiction writing and, in particular, the salience of their textual mechanisms of empowerment and gatekeeping. Analyzing fannish paratexts and fanfiction stories, this dissertation suggests for the first time that looking at the practice of writing per se is not enough to understand the transformations and re-identifications fanwriters have accomplished in recent years—and that it is especially not enough to satisfactorily grasp their emerging power and their influence on the media industry, which, as demonstrated in the case of *SPN* and its use of Mary Sue or RPF, in turn builds on these very means of fannish gatekeeping. Instead, the

specific strategies fans use in their texts point towards the need for a much more nuanced reading that simultaneously attributes greater agency to the fans themselves, who are, after all, the ones to employ these comprehensive strategies to attain power and to be understood as powerful.

Focusing on Author's Notes as one of the most prominent categories of fannish paratext has accordingly provided me with the all-important understanding of how fanauthors actually conceptualize their own position, furnishing fan studies with significant new insights into the community and its identity. Contrary to previous literature, my thesis demonstrates that the fanwriter does not only "commit the most aggressive form of reading" (Busse, "Return" 62) or merely "rewrite[s] the text" to "defy the original text-creator's own intentions to offer a critical or resistant reading" (Coker 84)—i.e. it demonstrates that the fanwriter is not above all defined by subversion as a common conception in fan studies has it (cf., for example, Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Scodari; Murray 8-13; Busse, "Fan" 388; Griffin 32) but that they use the hybrid construction of the fanauthor to define themselves as powerful in their own right: Amalgamating the 'dead' author, the powerful and god-like creative author, and the communal author, they have created for themselves an identity that draws its agency from these three models of authorship, negating the assumption that their power and activity are merely grounded in resisting an alleged "Author-God." Instead, their Author's Notes clearly illustrate that the fanauthor represents a powerful identity that enables them to transform the meta-text after 'killing' its author, to elevate their own writing in an "apotheosis of authorship" (Jaszi and Woodmansee 3), and to draw on the power of the community to dissolve the uniformity of the meta-text into many voices. Ultimately, it is thus the figure of the fanauthor which virtually embodies major principles of the fannish democratic archive, with its hybridity providing a three-fold foundation for the reconceptualization of media production by empowering fans and increasing fannish participation.

Another means of affirming fannish agency, fanspeak has proven an essential strategy fanauthors employ as a global feature in their paratexts as it allows them, on the one hand, to define themselves and their community as agents and, on the other, to differentiate between producers open to the idea of the archive and others who are (still) opposed to it. Discussed here for the first time in regard to its function as a boundary in community-building and as symbolizing fannish expertise, fannish jargon represents an

indicator of how powerful the fanauthors have become since the inception of the genre, signifying that neither their presence nor their attitudes, values, and principles can be easily disregarded in the (future) production of meta-texts. As my study illustrates, fanspeak first strengthens the participatory community of fanauthors by enabling them to distinguish members and non-members—i.e. the powerful and the powerless—while it simultaneously provides for archontic expansion and participation through serving as a means of ensuring cohesion and, in the form of a threshold, the influx of new members to the community. Furthermore, its second function of establishing the fanwriters as experts who "kn[o]w more about all the little details [of the meta-text] than the author" (JessicaLynn), whose gift economy establishes a moral counterweight to the commercialization of the media industry, and whose "discourse of their own" (Wright 21) signals their command of the text supports the fans' demand for transferring the principles of the archive to the meta-text and processes of production: Their expertise together with the multiplicity of their voices transcends the knowledge of the creators of the meta-text and their own values together with their own language situate them in a position of power from which vantage point they can in fact engage in "struggling […] with the writers about the ownership of the [meta-text]" (van Zoonen 61).

Abundant in the genre of fanfiction, similar strategies of empowerment can be found in many other categories of fannish paratext and in the stories themselves. Opening up the issue for future research, my thesis has used the examples of disclaimers and Mary Sue and RPF stories to provide an initial probe into other means of fannish gatekeeping and to suggest what these strategies can offer for studies that seek to discuss the as of yet highly neglected textual basis of fannish power. Complementing my analysis of A/Ns and fanspeak, my discussion of these three subjects offers new insights into fannish empowerment by their intricate functionalization of the author of the meta-text, the meta-text, and the absence of a meta-text, underlining that fanauthors employ multiple different venues to support their claims and their position as agents. As this dissertation shows, redefining the purpose of the disclaimer, having their avatar enter the archive of the meta-text, and constructing a meta-text of their own prove salient assertions of the fanwriters' authority and testify to the fact that they, in analogy to what Pat Pflieger writes about Mary Sues, "*d*[*o*]" and "not just simply *exis*[*t*]" (also cf. Chander and Sunder 608-09): Fanauthors use these and other strategies to actively renegotiate their position and to insist on their participation within the archive—both within the fictional universe of the text and

within processes of production. In this way, their 'doing' indicates that the fanauthors' gatekeeping strategies and means of affirming power are not only virtually omnipresent but that they are moreover effective, since the fanwriters in fact transform the media landscape through their activities to reshape it along the lines of their democratic archive. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Supernatural* provides a telling example of a meta-text that has apparently accepted the agency of its fanbase and seems to be well on the way of transforming itself into a participatory or, applying what I suggest in this conclusion, archontic TV show which does not shy away from acknowledging that the meta-text has ceased to be a solitary production and a preserve of hegemonial claims on part of the producers. Instead, its conception as quintessentially integrative and dialogic substantiates the validity of the research this dissertation is based on, ascertaining that indeed the creators of the meta-text are receptive to the fannish claims as encoded in their writing.

Although it still constitutes a relatively lone forerunner in sharing power with its fanbase, it is thus meta-texts like *Supernatural* which in the end support my reasoning that the agency of the fanauthor and the power of fanfiction may be able to effect a restructuring of the media industry to result in a more democratic production of cultural goods than there is as of now. Showing a possible future of TV making, its producers have seemingly followed up on many of the fannish strategies of empowerment so that participation of the fanauthors and dialogue among the two parties have led to a more equal balance of power than which characterizes other shows, both previous and contemporary. With their episodes full of fans, fanfiction, stories of fannish agency, and structural analogies to fannish genres, Eric Kripke, Sera Gamble, and all the other members of the creative team render visible that they (at least in parts) yield to the power of the fannish construction of the fanauthor, that they defer some of their own power to the fans' community and to the fannish experts, and that they are on their way to accepting the redefinition of power relations fans achieve through their disclaimers, through shaping the fictional universe as Mary Sues, and through creating a meta-text of their own through RPF: Repeatedly indicating in the meta-text and in its paratexts that "the writers, the actors, and the fans are all involved […] in collectively creating the world of the show" (CordeliaGray), *SPN* may therefore be the first show to be truly archontic—to be truly democratic in the way that "we, the fans" have long demanded, fought for, and written for.

Inherent in the genre of fanfiction itself since its first stories were created in the 1960s, the notion that there is in fact a "we, the fans" that can aspire to agency and power is now increasingly spreading to the outside of fandom itself and establishes fanauthors as a cultural force to be reckoned with. Alongside with the approach taken in this thesis to read the virtually infinite and heterogeneous fannish archive according to recurring patterns, this movement of a previously marginalized group seeking to acquire a greater share of power makes the discipline of American Studies particularly suited to studying fanfiction and fanauthors, since it is here that scholars have found suitable approaches to deal with many of fandom's demands, tenets, and characteristics. In return, this thesis also contributes to the discipline of American Studies itself since it is concerned with matters at the very heart of the field through its discussion of issues such as the democratization of the cultural landscape, the (re)distribution of power between different groups, and the participation of a grassroots movement in shaping larger cultural developments. Focusing on the hitherto little examined field of fanfiction whose contemporary roots, after all, lie in US popular culture and which originated in a US-American audience, this dissertation therefore adds, on the one hand, a novel perspective to these debates so prominent in American Studies and, on the other, fills a considerable gap in previous scholarship in the field. With fandom an increasingly global phenomenon which is on its rise to power, American Studies can accordingly greatly benefit from an analysis that is set to pave the way for a more intense discussion of the genre of fanfiction, the presence of fans in contemporary media and culture, and the changes their activities effect on hitherto stable constructions of power and identity. Studying a literary form whose core disputes revolve around questions of agency, visibility, and representation, this thesis thus contributes to major research areas in American Studies and helps understanding current trends in the media industry and US-American culture at large through providing a nuanced analysis of the increasing democratization of the creation of cultural artifacts.

Moreover, situating this dissertation in a decidedly American Studies perspective does not only contribute to this field of scholarship but also constitutes a valuable benefit in regard to researching fanfiction, especially when compared to the genre's traditional scholarly background of fan studies. So offers American Studies far more than a better comprehension of fanfiction due to the fact that it arose from US-American popular culture and that it, although their importance shows to be decreasing, still rests to a large majority on texts stemming from US-American authors, filmmakers, and showrunners;

instead, it is the focus American Studies puts on interdisciplinarity and transnationality that presents a significant advantage over other disciplines. In addition to abovementioned core questions and subjects in the context of power and democratization, the field's emphasis on these key issues has proven greatly beneficial to studying the active audience of fans, global fandom, and their democratic transformative activities. In consequence, approaching my thesis from an American Studies point of view has helped me to reconsider many of the alleged truths of fanfiction which have been perpetuated in fan studies for years and has offered me suitable tools to argue for new ways of looking at the texts of fanfiction—for new ways of looking at the figure of the fanauthor, for new readings of the function of fanspeak, and a new interpretation of the appropriation taking place within disclaimers, Mary Sue, and RPF. Although fanfiction has as of yet been little worked on from an American Studies perspective, I would thus argue that studying the genre from this scholarly background can add significant insights into researching fanauthors and into fan studies per se—especially since the democratic tradition inherent in both US-American history and culture, and as such reflected in the field of American Studies, has greatly influenced my analysis of fanfiction and has thus facilitated a fresh approach to the genre and novel insights into its practices, their consequences within fandom, and their impact on processes of production in the media industry.

Ultimately, American Studies may therefore be an especially fruitful approach to understanding a form of literature whose writers tend to insist on their rights in the language of the founding documents of the United States. As quoted in the introduction to this thesis, fanauthors frame their fanfiction activity by expressing their right to "write about what we want, how we want, when we want because in a way, it's one of our basic rights: freedom of speech" (Chris Robins)—they insist that "We the fans are in control" (Amy Zukas) and that "We, the fans, make our own version of our favourite characters, and twist and bend them to our will" (hazel-3017). In this way, they do not only completely refute their previously prevalent characterization as passive and caught up in an "inertia of consumption" (de Certeau 167) but assert their active transfer of democratic principles as so powerfully defined in the Constitution of the United States to the production of cultural artifacts and 'declare their independence' from the conventional hegemonies at work in the media landscape: With this specific way of phrasing their demand to participate in the creation of texts, fanauthors affirm that there can no longer be the binary of a powerless mass audience of fans and a powerful minority of producers

since everyone has a share in the power—they affirm that there can no longer be a small subset of people who holds power over its devotees since fans, to recall Annie from King's novel *Misery*, no longer need to be told "*what happens next*" (242) because now the story's "creative course" is completely *in*side rather than "outside of [their] hands" (107).

In the democratic venue of fanfiction, fans have become authors in their own right—as "we, the fans," they have the power to transform the meta-text through their participation, to dissolve traditional hegemonies through their involvement, and to shape both the meta-text and the archive and, to some degree, even the media industry through their activity. The fact that today they have revolutionized previous relations between the fannish audience and the creators of the meta-text to the extent of being represented in the meta-text, altering it through their transformative works, and making the producers engage in true dialogue with them speaks for a fundamental change in the answers to the questions posited in the beginning of this dissertation—as of who it is that possesses power, i.e. as of who is in a position of "cultural authority" ("Fans" 119) and "who owns culture" (Scafidi xii; also cf. Clerc): As the idea of an active and powerful audience seems to be slowly beginning to take root in the media industry that has progressively increased its acknowledgement and involvement of fans, nowadays the response in regard to these issues may in fact be that fanfiction has made fanauthors strengthen their "cultural authority" and acquire a greater share in cultural ownership. Their texts and their strategies have liberated them from an identity of poachers or "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 23), with the fannish democratic archive serving as a means of reconceptualizing processes of production and long-standing traditions of distributing power.

In the end, to draw on Stephen Greenblatt's concept of culture as a system of "*constraint* and *mobility*" (225), fanfiction and the fannish approach to creating cultural artifacts may thus bring about far-reaching consequences in the US-American or global cultural landscape as they force everyone involved to engage with the questions of "[w]hat kinds of behavior, what models of practice, does [fanfiction] seem to enforce" and if there are "differences between [one's own] values and the values implicit in [fanfiction]" (226)—fanauthors and their activities force everyone to interrogate established principles, entities, and modes of thinking about cultural processes. As such, the fact that fanfiction and its communal, participatory, and democratic practices may be considered as situated

"on the very edges of what can be [done]" in our present-day media industry and therefore as batter[ing] against the boundaries of their own culture" (231) makes it, in accordance with Greenblatt, particularly suited to ensuring movement in previously established cultural boundaries—makes it an example of the "power of art" (231) in effecting a more communal, participatory, and democratic conception of producing cultural artifacts.

Reading fanfiction as a "guarantor of movement" (Greenblatt 228), my research thus confirms my initial position that the genre of fanfiction has great democratic potential—i.e. that its inherently democratic, participatory, and dialogic nature can indeed affect today's media landscape to revolutionize it along the democratic principles of involvement, inclusion, representation, and equality; in short, to revolutionize it to bring about a greater balance of power. Symptomatic of major cultural developments affecting societies in the wake of Web 2.0 and the ongoing digitization of life through its emphasis on dialogue and participation, fanfiction has long sought to bring about "movement"—has long been pushing at prevalent hierarchies and identity formations to change the distribution of power in the media industry and its understanding of production by echoing US-American constructions of democracy, i.e. by giving power to the previously powerless via a grassroots movement of multiple voices. This dissertation has shown that fans have manifold strategies at their disposal to assert their "basic righ[t]" of the "freedom of the speech" (Chris Robins) and have made the media industry respond to their exercise of this most "basic righ[t]": It is "we, the fans" who renegotiate power, who make the producers "transplant true blue fanfiction to the screen" (Mia Nina), who render fandom, in Kim Bannister's words, "a living, evolving thing" that "form[s] a whole new creation"—in the end, it is "we, the fans" who redistribute power between fans and producers in the democratic archive of fanfiction.

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